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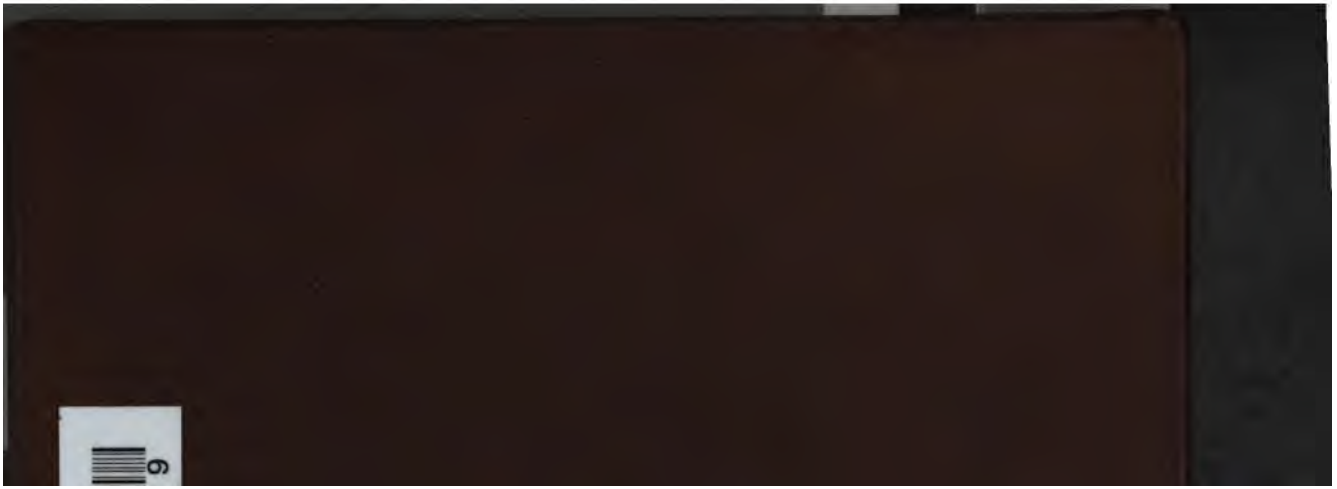

COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. CCLIV.

RUTH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

RUTH.

A NOVEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "MARY BARTON."

Mrs Gaskell

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ
1853.

Drop, Drop slow tears!
  And bathe those beauteous feet,
Which brought from heaven
  The news and Prince of peace.
Cease not, wet eyes,
  For mercy to entreat:
To cry for vengeance
  Sin doth never cease.
In your deep floods
  Drown all my faults and fears;
Nor let His eye
  See sin, but through my tears.

Phineas Fletcher.

RUTH.

VOL. I.

CHAPTER I.

THERE is an assize-town in one of the eastern counties which was much distinguished by the Tudor sovereigns, and, in consequence of their favour and protection, attained a degree of importance that surprises the modern traveller.

A hundred years ago, its appearance was that of picturesque grandeur. The old houses, which were the temporary residences of such of the county-families as contented themselves with the gaieties of a provincial town, crowded the streets and gave them the irregular but noble appearance yet to be seen in the cities of Belgium. The sides of the streets had a quaint richness, from the effect of the gables, and the stacks of chimneys which cut against the blue sky above; while, if the eye fell lower down, the attention was arrested by all kinds of projections in the shape of balcony and oriel; and it was amusing to see the infinite variety of windows that had been crammed into the walls long before Mr. Pitt's days of taxation. The streets below suffered from all these projections and advanced stories

above; they were dark, and ill-paved with large, round, jolting pebbles, and with no side-path protected by kerb-stones; there were no lamp-posts for long winter nights; and no regard was paid to the wants of the middle class, who neither drove about in coaches of their own, nor were carried by their own men in their own sedans into the very halls of their friends. The professional men and their wives, the shopkeepers and their spouses, and all such people, walked about at considerable peril both night and day. The broad unwieldy carriages hemmed them up against the houses in the narrow streets. The inhospitable houses projected their flights of steps almost into the carriage-way, forcing pedestrians again into the danger they had avoided for twenty or thirty paces. Then, at night, the only light was derived from the glaring, flaring oil-lamps hung above the doors of the more aristocratic mansions; just allowing space for the passers-by to become visible, before they again disappeared into the darkness, where it was no uncommon thing for robbers to be in waiting for their prey.

The traditions of those bygone times, even to the smallest social particular, enable one to understand more clearly the circumstances which contributed to the formation of character. The daily life into which people are born, and into which they are absorbed before they are well aware, forms chains which only one in a hundred has moral strength enough to despise, and to break when the right time comes — when an inward necessity for independent individual action arises, which is superior to all outward conventionalities. Therefore it is well to know what were the chains of daily domestic habit which were the natural

leadings-strings of our forefathers before they learnt to go alone.

The picturesqueness of those ancient streets has departed now. The Astleys, the Dunstans, the Waverhams — names of power in that district — go up duly to London in the season, and have sold their residences in the county-town fifty years ago, or more. And when the county-town lost its attraction for the Astleys, the Dunstans, the Waverhams, how could it be supposed that the Domvilles, the Bextons, and the Wildes would continue to go and winter there in their second-rate houses, and with their increased expenditure? So the grand old houses stood empty awhile; and then speculators ventured to purchase, and to turn the deserted mansions into many smaller dwellings, fitted for professional men, or even (bend your ear lower, lest the shade of Marmaduke, first Baron Waverham, hear) into shops!

Even that was not so very bad, compared with the next innovation on the old glories. The shopkeepers found out that the once fashionable street was dark, and that the dingy light did not show off their goods to advantage; the surgeon could not see to draw his patients' teeth; the lawyer had to ring for candles an hour earlier than he was accustomed to do when living in a more plebeian street. In short, by mutual consent, the whole front of one side of the street was pulled down, and rebuilt in the flat, mean, unrelieved style of George the Third. The body of the houses was too solidly grand to submit to alteration; so people were occasionally surprised, after passing through a *common-place-looking* shop, to find themselves at the *foot of a grand* carved oaken staircase, lighted by a

window of stained glass, storied all over with armorial bearings.

Up such a stair — past such a window (through which the moonlight fell on her with a glory of many colours) — Ruth Hilton passed wearily one January night, now many years ago. I call it night; but, strictly speaking, it was morning. Two o'clock in the morning chimed forth the old bells of St. Saviour's. And yet more than a dozen girls still sat in the room into which Ruth entered, stitching away as if for very life, not daring to gape, or show any outward manifestation of sleepiness. They only sighed a little when Ruth told Mrs. Mason the hour of the night, as the result of her errand; for they knew that, stay up as late as they might, the work-hours of the next day must begin at eight, and their young limbs were very weary.

Mrs. Mason worked away as hard as any of them; but she was older and tougher; and, besides, the gains were hers. But even she perceived that some rest was needed. "Young ladies! there will be an interval allowed of half an hour. Ring the bell, Miss Sutton. Martha shall bring you up some bread and cheese and beer. You will be so good as to eat it standing — away from the dresses — and to have your hands washed ready for work when I return. In half an hour," said she once more, very distinctly; and then she left the room.

It was curious to watch the young girls as they instantaneously availed themselves of Mrs. Mason's absence. One fat, particularly heavy-looking damsel, laid her head on her folded arms and was asleep in a moment; refusing to be wakened for her share in the tru-

gal supper, but springing up with a frightened look at the sound of Mrs. Mason's returning footstep, even while it was still far off on the echoing stairs. Two or three others huddled over the scanty fireplace, which, with every possible economy of space, and no attempt whatever at anything of grace or ornament, was inserted in the slight, flat-looking wall, that had been run up by the present owner of the property to portion off this division of the grand old drawing-room of the mansion. Some employed the time in eating their bread and cheese, with as measured and incessant a motion of the jaws (and almost as stupidly placid an expression of countenance), as you may see in cows ruminating in the first meadow you happen to pass.

Some held up admiringly the beautiful ball-dress in progress, while others examined the effect, backing from the object to be criticised in the true artistic manner. Others stretched themselves into all sorts of postures to relieve the weary muscles; one or two gave vent to all the yawns, coughs, and sneezes that had been pent up so long in the presence of Mrs. Mason. But Ruth Hilton sprang to the large old window, and pressed against it as a bird presses against the bars of its cage. She put back the blind, and gazed into the quiet moonlight night. It was doubly light — almost as much so as day — for everything was covered with the deep snow which had been falling silently ever since the evening before. The window was in a square recess; the old strange little panes of glass had been replaced by those which gave more light. A little distance off, the feathery branches of a larch waved softly to and fro in the scarcely perceptible night-breeze. Poor old larch! the time had been when it

had stood in a pleasant lawn, with the tender grass creeping caressingly up to its very trunk; but now the lawn was divided into yards and squalid back premises, and the larch was pent up and girded about with flagstones. The snow lay thick on its boughs, and now and then fell noiselessly down. The old stables had been added to, and altered into a dismal street of mean-looking houses, back to back with the ancient mansions. And over all these changes from grandeur to squalor, bent down the purple heavens with their unchanging splendour!

Ruth pressed her hot forehead against the cold glass, and strained her aching eyes in gazing out on the lovely sky of a winter's night. The impulse was strong upon her to snatch up a shawl, and wrapping it round her head, to sally forth and enjoy the glory; and time was when that impulse would have been instantly followed; but now, Ruth's eyes filled with tears, and she stood quite still, dreaming of the days that were gone. Some one touched her shoulder while her thoughts were far away, remembering past January nights, which had resembled this, and were yet so different.

"Ruth, love," whispered a girl who had unwillingly distinguished herself by a long hard fit of coughing, "come and have some supper. You don't know yet how it helps one through the night."

"One run — one blow of the fresh air would do me more good," said Ruth.

"Not such a night as this," replied the other, shivering at the very thought.

"And why not such a night as this, Jenny?" answered Ruth. "Oh! at home I have many a time run up the lane all the way to the mill, just to see the

icicles hang on the great wheel, and when I was once out, I could hardly find in my heart to come in, even to mother, sitting by the fire; — even to mother," she added, in a low, melancholy tone, which had something of inexpressible sadness in it. "Why, Jenny!" said she, rousing herself, but not before her eyes were swimming in tears, "own, now, that you never saw those dismal, hateful, tumble-down old houses there look half so — what shall I call them? almost beautiful — as they do now, with that soft, pure, exquisite covering; and if they are so improved, think of what trees, and grass, and ivy, must be on such a night as this."

Jenny could not be persuaded into admiring the winter's night, which to her came only as a cold and dismal time, when her cough was more troublesome, and the pain in her side worse than usual. But she put her arm round Ruth's neck, and stood by her glad that the orphan apprentice, who was not yet inured to the hardship of a dressmaker's work-room, should find so much to give her pleasure in such a common occurrence as a frosty night.

They remained deep in separate trains of thought till Mrs. Mason's step was heard, when each returned, supperless but refreshed, to her seat.

Ruth's place was the coldest and the darkest in the room, although she liked it the best; she had instinctively chosen it for the sake of the wall opposite to her, on which was a remnant of the beauty of the old drawing-room, which must once have been magnificent, to judge from the faded specimen left. It was divided into panels of pale sea-green, picked out with white and gold; and on these panels were painted — were thrown with the careless, triumphant hand of a

master — the most lovely wreaths of flowers, profuse and luxuriant beyond description, and so real-looking, that you could almost fancy you smelt their fragrance, and heard the south wind go softly rustling in and out among the crimson roses — the branches of purple and white lilac — the floating golden-tressed laburnum boughs. Besides these, there were stately white lilies, sacred to the Virgin — hollyhocks, fraxinella, monk's-hood, pansies, primroses; every flower which blooms profusely in charming old-fashioned country-gardens was there, depicted among its graceful foliage, but not in the wild disorder in which I have enumerated them. At the bottom of the panel lay a holly-branch, whose stiff straightness was ornamented by a twining drapery of English ivy and mistletoe and winter aconite; while down either side hung pendant garlands of spring and autumn flowers; and, crowning all, came gorgeous summer with the sweet musk-roses, and the rich-coloured flowers of June and July.

Surely Monnoyer, or whoever the dead and gone artist might be, would have been gratified to know the pleasure his handiwork, even in its wane, had power to give to the heavy heart of a young girl; for they conjured up visions of other sister-flowers that grew, and blossomed, and withered away in her early home.

Mrs. Mason was particularly desirous that her work-women should exert themselves to-night, for, on the next, the annual hunt-ball was to take place. It was the one gaiety of the town since the assize-balls had been discontinued. Many were the dresses she had promised should be sent home "without fail" the next *morning; she had not* let one slip through her fingers, *for fear, if it did, it* might fall into the hands of the

rival dressmaker, who had just established herself in the very same street.

She determined to administer a gentle stimulant to the flagging spirits, and with a little preliminary cough to attract attention, she began:

"I may as well inform you, young ladies, that I have been requested this year, as on previous occasions, to allow some of my young people to attend in the ante-chamber of the assembly-room with sandal ribbon, pins, and such little matters, and to be ready to repair any accidental injury to the ladies' dresses. I shall send four — of the most diligent." She laid a marked emphasis on the last words, but without much effect; they were too sleepy to care for any of the pomps and vanities, or, indeed, for any of the comforts of this world, excepting one sole thing — their beds.

Mrs. Mason was a very worthy woman, but, like many other worthy women, she had her foibles; and one (very natural to her calling) was to pay an extreme regard to appearances. Accordingly, she had already selected in her own mind the four girls who were most likely to do credit to the "establishment;" and these were secretly determined upon, although it was very well to promise the reward to the most diligent. She was really not aware of the falseness of this conduct; being an adept in that species of sophistry with which people persuade themselves that what they wish to do is right.

At last there was no resisting the evidence of weariness. They were told to go to bed; but even that welcome command was languidly obeyed. Slowly they folded up their work, heavily they moved about, until at *length all was put* away, and they trooped up the *wide, dark staircase.*

"Oh! how shall I get through five years of these terrible nights! in that close room! and in that oppressive stillness! which lets every sound of the thread be heard as it goes eternally backwards and forwards," sobbed out Ruth, as she threw herself on her bed, without even undressing herself.

"Nay, Ruth, you know it won't be always as it has been to-night. We often get to bed by ten o'clock; and by-and-by you won't mind the closeness of the room. You're worn out to-night, or you would not have minded the sound of the needle; I never hear it. Come, let me unfasten you," said Jenny.

"What is the use of undressing? We must be up again and at work in three hours."

"And in those three hours you may get a great deal of rest, if you will but undress yourself and fairly go to bed. Come, love."

Jenny's advice was not resisted; but before Ruth went to sleep, she said:

"Oh! I wish I was not so cross and impatient. I don't think I used to be."

"No, I am sure not. Most new girls get impatient at first; but it goes off, and they don't care much for anything after awhile. Poor child! she's asleep already," said Jenny to herself.

She could not sleep or rest. The tightness at her side was worse than usual. She almost thought she ought to mention it in her letters home; but then she remembered the premium her father had struggled hard to pay, and the large family, younger than herself, that *had to be* cared for, and she determined to bear on, *and trust that* when the warm weather came both the

pain and the cough would go away. She would be prudent about herself.

What was the matter with Ruth? She was crying in her sleep as if her heart would break. Such agitated slumber could be no rest; so Jenny wakened her.

"Ruth! Ruth!"

"Oh, Jenny!" said Ruth, sitting up in bed, and pushing back the masses of hair that were heating her forehead, "I thought I saw mamma by the side of the bed, coming, as she used to do, to see if I were asleep and comfortable; and when I tried to take hold of her, she went away and left me alone — I don't know where; so strange!"

"It was only a dream; you know you'd been talking about her to me, and you're feverish with sitting up late. Go to sleep again, and I'll watch, and waken you if you seem uneasy."

"But you'll be so tired. Oh, dear! dear!" Ruth was asleep again, even while she sighed.

Morning came, and though their rest had been short, the girls arose refreshed.

"Miss Sutton, Miss Jennings, Miss Booth, and Miss Hilton, you will see that you are ready to accompany me to the shire-hall by eight o'clock."

One or two of the girls looked astonished, but the majority, having anticipated the selection, and knowing from experience the unexpressed rule by which it was made, received it with the sullen indifference which had become their feeling with regard to most events — a deadened sense of life, consequent upon their unnatural mode of existence, their sedentary days, and their *frequent nights of late* watching.

But to Ruth it was inexplicable. She had yawned,

and loitered, and looked off at the beautiful panel, and lost herself in thoughts of home, until she fully expected the reprimand which at any other time she would have been sure to receive, and now, to her surprise, she was singled out as one of the most diligent!

Much as she longed for the delight of seeing the noble shire-hall — the boast of the county — and of catching glimpses of the dancers, and hearing the band; much as she longed for some variety to the dull monotonous life she was leading, she could not feel happy to accept a privilege, granted, as she believed, in ignorance of the real state of the case; so she startled her companions by rising abruptly and going up to Mrs. Mason, who was finishing a dress which ought to have been sent home two hours before:

"If you please, Mrs. Mason, I was not one of the most diligent; I am afraid — I believe — I was not diligent at all. I was very tired; and I could not help thinking, and when I think, I can't attend to my work." She stopped, believing she had sufficiently explained her meaning; but Mrs. Mason would not understand, and did not wish for any further elucidation.

"Well, my dear, you must learn to think and work too; or, if you can't do both, you must leave off thinking. Your guardian, you know, expects you to make great progress in your business, and I am sure you won't disappoint him."

But that was not to the point. Ruth stood still an instant, although Mrs. Mason resumed her employment in a manner which any one but a "new girl" would have known to be intelligible enough, that she did not *wish for any more* conversation just then.

"*But as I was* not diligent I ought not to go,

Ma'am. Miss Wood was far more industrious than I, and many of the others."

"Tiresome girl!" muttered Mrs. Mason; "I 've half a mind to keep her at home for plaguing me so." But, looking up, she was struck afresh with the remarkable beauty which Ruth possessed; such a credit to the house, with her waving outline of figure, her striking face, with dark eyebrows and dark lashes, combined with auburn hair and a fair complexion. No! diligent or idle, Ruth Hilton must appear to-night.

"Miss Hilton," said Mrs. Mason, with stiff dignity, "I am not accustomed (as these young ladies can tell you) to have my decisions questioned. What I say, I mean; and I have my reasons. So sit down, if you please, and take care and be ready by eight. Not a word more," as she fancied she saw Ruth again about to speak.

"Jenny! you ought to have gone, not me," said Ruth, in no low voice to Miss Wood, as she sat down by her.

"Hush! Ruth. I could not go if I might, because of my cough. I would rather give it up to you than any one, if it were mine to give. And suppose it is, and take the pleasure as my present, and tell me every bit about it when you come home to-night."

"Well! I shall take it in that way, and not as if I'd earned it, which I haven't. So thank you. You can't think how I shall enjoy it now. I did work diligently for five minutes last night, after I heard of it, I wanted to go so much. But I could not keep it up. *Oh, dear! and I* shall really hear a band! and *see the inside of that* beautiful shire-hall!"

CHAPTER II.

In due time that evening, Mrs. Mason collected "her young ladies" for an inspection of their appearance before proceeding to the shire-hall. Her eager, important, hurried manner of summoning them was not unlike that of a hen clucking her chickens together; and to judge from the close investigation they had to undergo, it might have been thought that their part in the evening's performance was to be far more important than that of temporary ladies'-maids.

"Is that your best frock, Miss Hilton?" asked Mrs. Mason, in a half-dissatisfied tone, turning Ruth about; for it was only her Sunday black silk, and was somewhat worn and shabby.

"Yes, Ma'am," answered Ruth, quietly.

"Oh! indeed. Then it will do" (still the half-satisfied tone). "Dress, young ladies, you know is a very secondary consideration. Conduct is everything. Still, Miss Hilton, I think you should write and ask your guardian to send you money for another gown. I am sorry I did not think of it before."

"I do not think he would send any if I wrote," answered Ruth, in a low voice. "He was angry when I wanted a shawl, when the cold weather set in."

Mrs. Mason gave her a little push of dismissal, and Ruth fell into the ranks by her friend, Miss Wood.

"Never mind, Ruthie; you're prettier than any of them," said a merry, good-natured girl, whose plainness excluded her from any of the envy of rivalry.

"Yes! I know I am pretty," said Ruth, sadly, "but I am sorry I have no better gown, for this is very shabby. I am ashamed of it myself, and I can see Mrs. Mason is twice as much ashamed. I wish I need not go. I did not know we should have to think about our own dress at all, or I should not have wished to go."

"Never mind, Ruth," said Jenny, "you've been looked at now, and Mrs. Mason will soon be too busy to think about you and your gown."

"Did you hear Ruth Hilton say she knew she was pretty?" whispered one girl to another, so loudly that Ruth caught the words.

"I could not help knowing," answered she, simply, "for many people have told me so."

At length these preliminaries were over, and they were walking briskly through the frosty air; the free motion was so inspiriting that Ruth almost danced along, and quite forgot all about shabby gowns and grumbling guardians. The shire-hall was even more striking than she had expected. The sides of the staircase were painted with figures that showed ghostly in the dim light, for only their faces looked out of the dark dingy canvas, with strange fixed stare of expression.

The young milliners had to arrange their wares on tables in the ante-room, and make all ready before they could venture to peep into the ball-room, where the musicians were already tuning their instruments, and where one or two char-women (strange contrast! with their dirty, loose attire, and their incessant chatter, to the grand echoes of the vaulted room) were completing the dusting of benches and chairs.

They quitted the place as Ruth and her companions entered. They had talked lightly and merrily in the ante-room, but now their voices were hushed, awed by the old magnificence of the vast apartment. It was so large, that objects showed dim at the further end, as through a mist. Full-length figures of county worthies hung around, in all varieties of costume, from the days of Holbein to the present time. The lofty roof was indistinct, for the lamps were not fully lighted; yet while through the richly-painted Gothic window at one end the moonbeams fell, many-tinted, on the floor, and mocked with their vividness the struggles of the artificial light to illuminate its little sphere.

High above sounded the musicians, fitfully trying some strain of which they were not certain. Then they stopped playing and talked, and their voices sounded goblin-like in their dark recess, where candles were carried about in an uncertain wavering manner, reminding Ruth of the flickering zig-zag motion of the will-o'-the-wisp.

Suddenly the room sprang into the full blaze of light, and Ruth felt less impressed with its appearance, and more willing to obey Mrs. Mason's sharp summons to her wandering flock, than she had been when it was dim and mysterious. They had presently enough to do in rendering offices of assistance to the ladies who thronged in, and whose voices drowned all the muffled sound of the band Ruth had longed so much to hear. Still, if one pleasure was less, another was greater than she had anticipated.

"On condition" of such a number of little observances that Ruth thought Mrs. Mason would never have ended enumerating them, they were allowed

during the dances to stand at a side-door and watch. And what a beautiful sight it was! Floating away to that bounding music, now far away, like garlands of fairies, now near, and showing as lovely women, with every ornament of graceful dress, the élite of the county danced on, little caring whose eyes gazed and were dazzled. Outside all was cold, and colourless, and uniform, one coating of snow over all. But inside it was warm, and glowing, and vivid; flowers scented the air, and wreathed the head, and rested on the bosom, as if it were midsummer. Bright colours flashed on the eye and were gone, and succeeded by others as lovely in the rapid movement of the dance. Smiles dimpled every face, and low tones of happiness murmured indistinctly through the room in every pause of the music.

Ruth did not care to separate the figures that formed a joyous and brilliant whole; it was enough to gaze, and dream of the happy smoothness of the lives in which such music, and such profusion of flowers, of jewels, elegance of every description, and beauty of all shapes and hues, were every-day things. She did not want to know who the people were; although to hear a catalogue of names seemed to be the great delight of most of her companions.

In fact, the enumeration rather disturbed her; and to avoid the shock of too rapid a descent into the common-place world of Miss Smiths and Mr. Thomsons, she returned to her post in the ante-room. There she stood thinking, or dreaming. She was startled back to actual life by a voice close to her. One of the dancing young ladies had met with a misfortune. Her dress, of some gossamer material, had

been looped up by nosegays of flowers, and one of these had fallen off in the dance, leaving her gown to trail. To repair this, she had begged her partner to bring her to the room where the assistants should have been. None were there but Ruth.

"Shall I leave you?" asked the gentleman. "Is my absence necessary?"

"Oh, no!" replied the lady. "A few stitches will set all to rights. Besides, I dare not enter that room by myself." So far she spoke sweetly and prettily. But now she addressed Ruth. "Make haste. Don't keep me an hour." And her voice became cold and authoritative.

She was very pretty, with long dark ringlets and sparkling black eyes. These had struck Ruth in the hasty glance she had taken, before she knelt down to her task. She also saw that the gentleman was young and elegant.

"Oh, that lovely galoppe! How I long to dance to it! Will it never be done? What a frightful time you are taking; and I 'm dying to return in time for this galoppe!"

By way of showing a pretty child-like impatience, she began to beat time with her feet to the spirited air the band was playing. Ruth could not darn the rent in her dress with this continual motion, and she looked up to remonstrate. As she threw her head back for this purpose, she caught the eye of the gentleman who was standing by; it was so expressive of amusement at the airs and graces of his pretty partner, that Ruth was infected by the feeling, and had to bend her face down to conceal the smile that mantled ther But not before he had seen it, and not before h

tention had been thereby drawn to consider the kneeling figure, that, habited in black up to the throat, with the noble head bent down to the occupation in which she was engaged, formed such a contrast to the flippant, bright, artificial girl who sat to be served with an air as haughty as a queen on her throne.

"Oh, Mr. Bellingham! I 'm ashamed to detain you so long. I had no idea any one could have spent so much time over a little tear. No wonder Mrs. Mason charges so much for dress-making, if her work-women are so slow."

It was meant to be witty, but Mr. Bellingham looked grave. He saw the scarlet colour of annoyance flush to that beautiful cheek which was partially presented to him. He took a candle from the table, and held it so that Ruth had more light. She did not look up to thank him, for she felt ashamed that he should have seen the smile which she had caught from him.

"I am sorry I have been so long, Ma'am," said she, gently, as she finished her work. "I was afraid it might tear out again if I did not do it carefully." She rose.

"I would rather have had it torn than have missed that charming galoppe," said the young lady, shaking out her dress as a bird shakes its plumage. "Shall we go, Mr. Bellingham?" looking up at him.

He was surprised that she gave no word or sign of thanks to the assistant. He took up a camelia that some one had left on the table.

"Allow me, Miss Duncombe, to give this in your name to *this young lady*, as thanks for her dexterous *help.*"

"Oh — of course," said she.

Ruth received the flower silently, but with a grav modest motion of her head. They had gone, and sh was once more alone. Presently, her companions re turned.

"What was the matter with Miss Duncombe? Di she come here?" asked they.

"Only her lace dress was torn, and I mended it, answered Ruth, quietly.

"Did Mr. Bellingham come with her? They sa he's going to be married to her; did he come, Ruth?

"Yes," said Ruth, and relapsed into silence.

Mr. Bellingham danced on gaily and merrily throug the night, and flirted with Miss Duncombe, as h thought good. But he looked often to the side-doo where the milliner's apprentices stood; and once h recognised the tall, slight figure, and the rich auburn hair of the girl in black; and then his eye sought fo the camelia. It was there, snowy white in her boson And he danced on more gaily than ever.

The cold grey dawn was drearily lighting up th streets when Mrs. Mason and her company returne home. The lamps were extinguished, yet the shutter of the shops and dwelling-houses were not opene All sounds had an echo unheard by day. One or tw houseless beggars sat on door-steps, and, shiverin slept, with heads bowed on their knees, or restin against the cold hard support afforded by the wall.

Ruth felt as if a dream had melted away, and sh were once more in the actual world. How long would be, even in the most favourable chance, befor she should again enter the shire-hall! or hear a ban of music! or even see again those bright happy peopl

— as much without any semblance of care or woe as if they belonged to another race of beings. Had they ever to deny themselves a wish, much less a want? Literally and figuratively, their lives seemed to wander through flowery pleasure-paths. Here was cold, biting mid-winter for her, and such as her — for those poor beggars almost a season of death; but to Miss Duncombe and her companions, a happy, merry time, when flowers still bloomed, and fires crackled, and comforts and luxuries were piled around them like fairy gifts. What did they know of the meaning of the word, so terrific to the poor? What was winter to them? But Ruth fancied that Mr. Bellingham looked as if he could understand the feelings of those removed from him by circumstances and station. He had drawn up the windows of his carriage, it is true, with a shudder.

Ruth, then, had been watching him.

Yet she had no idea that any association made her camelia precious to her. She believed it was solely on account of its exquisite beauty that she tended it so carefully. She told Jenny every particular of its presentation, with open, straight-looking eye, and without the deepening of a shade of colour.

"Was it not kind of him? You can't think how nicely he did it, just when I was a little bit mortified by her ungracious ways."

"It was very nice, indeed," replied Jenny. "Such a beautiful flower! I wish it had some scent."

"I wish it to be exactly as it is; it is perfect. So pure!" said Ruth, almost clasping her treasure as she placed it in water. "Who is Mr. Bellingham?"

"He is son to that Mrs. Bellingham of the Priory,

for whom we made the grey satin pelisse," answered Jenny, sleepily.

"That was before my time," said Ruth. But there was no answer. Jenny was asleep.

It was long before Ruth followed her example. Even on a winter day, it was clear morning light that fell upon her face as she smiled in her slumber. Jenny would not waken her, but watched her face with admiration; it was so lovely in its happiness.

"She is dreaming of last night," thought Jenny.

It was true she was; but one figure flitted more than all the rest through her visions. He presented flower after flower to her in that baseless morning dream, which was all too quickly ended. The night before, she had seen her dead mother in her sleep, and she wakened, weeping. And now she dreamed of Mr. Bellingham, and smiled.

And yet, was this a more evil dream than the other?

The realities of life seemed to cut more sharply against her heart than usual that morning. The late hours of the preceding nights, and perhaps the excitement of the evening before, had indisposed her to bear calmly the rubs and crosses which beset all Mrs. Mason's young ladies at times.

For Mrs. Mason, though the first dressmaker in the county, was human after all; and suffered, like her apprentices, from the same causes that affected them. This morning she was disposed to find fault with everything, and everybody. She seemed to have risen with the determination of putting the world and all that it *contained (her* world, at least) to rights before night; *and abuses and* negligences, which had long passed

unreproved, or winked at, were to-day to be dragged to light, and sharply reprimanded. Nothing less than perfection would satisfy Mrs. Mason at such times.

She had her ideas of justice, too; but they were not divinely beautiful and true ideas; they were something more resembling a grocer's, or tea-dealer's ideas of equal right. A little over-indulgence last night was to be balanced by a good deal of over-severity to-day; and this manner of rectifying previous errors fully satisfied her conscience.

Ruth was not inclined for, or capable of, much extra exertion; and it would have tasked all her powers to have pleased her superior. The work-room seemed filled with sharp calls. "Miss Hilton! where have you put the blue Persian? Whenever things are mislaid, I know it has been Miss Hilton's evening for siding away!"

"Miss Hilton was going out last night, so I offered to clear the work-room for her. I will find it directly, Ma'am," answered one of the girls.

"Oh, I am well aware of Miss Hilton's custom of shuffling off her duties upon any one who can be induced to relieve her," replied Mrs. Mason.

Ruth reddened, and tears sprang to her eyes; but she was so conscious of the falsity of the accusation, that she rebuked herself for being moved by it, and, raising her head, gave a proud look round, as if in appeal to her companions.

"Where is the skirt of Lady Farnham's dress? The flounces not put on! I am surprised. May I ask to whom this work was entrusted yesterday?" inquired Mrs. Mason, fixing her eyes on Ruth.

"I was to have done it, but I made a mistake, and had to undo it. I am very sorry."

"I might have guessed, certainly. There is little difficulty, to be sure, in discovering, when work has been neglected or spoilt, into whose hands it has fallen."

Such were the speeches which fell to Ruth's share on this day of all days, when she was least fitted to bear them with equanimity.

In the afternoon it was necessary for Mrs. Mason to go a few miles into the country. She left injunctions, and orders, and directions, and prohibitions without end; but at last she was gone, and in the relief of her absence, Ruth laid her arms on the table, and, burying her head, began to cry aloud, with weak, unchecked sobs.

"Don't cry, Miss Hilton," — "Ruthie, never mind the old dragon," — "How will you bear on for five years, if you don't spirit yourself up not to care a straw for what she says?" — were some of the modes of comfort and sympathy administered by the young work-women.

Jenny, with a wiser insight into the grievance and its remedy, said:

"Suppose Ruth goes out instead of you, Fanny Barton, to do the errands. The fresh air will do her good; and you know you dislike the cold east winds, while Ruth says she enjoys frost and snow, and all kinds of shivery weather."

Fanny Barton was a great sleepy-looking girl, huddling over the fire. No one so willing as she to relinquish the walk on this bleak afternoon, when the east wind blew keenly down the street, drying up the

very snow itself. There was no temptation to come abroad, for those who were not absolutely obliged to leave their warm rooms; indeed, the dusk hour showed that it was the usual tea-time for the humble inhabitants of that part of the town through which Ruth had to pass on her shopping expedition. As she came to the high ground just above the river, where the street sloped rapidly down to the bridge, she saw the flat country beyond all covered with snow, making the black dome of the cloud-laden sky appear yet blacker; as if the winter's night had never fairly gone away, but had hovered on the edge of the world all through the short bleak day. Down by the bridge (where there was a little shelving bank, used as a landing-place for any pleasure-boats that could float on that shallow stream) some children were playing, and defying the cold; one of them had got a large washing-tub, and with the use of a broken oar kept steering and pushing himself hither and thither in the little creek, much to the admiration of his companions, who stood gravely looking on, immovable in their attentive observation of the hero, although their faces were blue with cold, and their hands crammed deep into their pockets with some faint hope of finding warmth there. Perhaps they feared that, if they unpacked themselves from their lumpy attitudes and began to move about, the cruel wind would find its way into every cranny of their tattered dress. They were all huddled up, and still; with eyes intent on the embryo sailor. At last, one little man, envious of the reputation that his playfellow was acquiring by his daring, called out:

"I'll set thee a craddy, Tom! Thou dar'n't go

over yon black line in the water, out into the real river."

Of course the challenge was not to be refused, and Tom paddled away towards the dark line, beyond which the river swept with smooth, steady current. Ruth (a child in years herself) stood at the top of the declivity watching the adventurer, but as unconscious of any danger as the group of children below. At their playfellow's success, they broke through the calm gravity of observation into boisterous marks of applause, clapping their hands, and stamping their impatient little feet, and shouting, "Well done, Tom; thou hast done it rarely!"

Tom stood in childish dignity for a moment, facing his admirers; then, in an instant, his washing-tub boat was whirled round, and he lost his balance, and fell out; and both he and his boat were carried away slowly, but surely, by the strong full river which eternally moved onwards to the sea.

The children shrieked aloud with terror; and Ruth flew down to the little bay, and far into its shallow waters, before she felt how useless such an action was, and that the sensible plan would have been to seek for efficient help. Hardly had this thought struck her, when, louder and sharper than the sullen roar of the stream that was ceaselessly and unrelentingly flowing on, came the splash of a horse galloping through the water in which she was standing. Passed her like lightning — down in the stream, swimming along with the current — a stooping rider — an outstretched, grasping arm — a little life redeemed, and a child *saved to* those who loved it! Ruth stood dizzy and *sick with emotion* while all this took place, and when

the rider turned his swimming horse, and slowly breasted up the river to the landing-place, she recognised him as the Mr. Bellingham of the night before. He carried the unconscious child across his horse; the body hung in so lifeless a manner that Ruth believed it was dead, and her eyes were suddenly blinded with tears. She waded back to the beach, to the point towards which Mr. Bellingham was directing his horse.

"Is he dead?" asked she, stretching out her arms to receive the little fellow; for she instinctively felt that the position in which he hung was not the most conducive to returning consciousness, if, indeed, it would ever return.

"I think not," answered Mr. Bellingham, as he gave the child to her, before springing off his horse. "Is he your brother? Do you know who he is?"

"Look!" said Ruth, who had sat down upon the ground, the better to prop the poor lad, "his hand twitches! he lives! oh, Sir, he lives! Whose boy is he?" (to the people, who came hurrying and gathering to the spot at the rumour of an accident.)

"He 's old Nelly Brownson's," said they. "Her grandson."

"We must take him into a house directly," said she. "Is his home far off?"

"No, no; it 's just close by."

"One of you go for a doctor at once," said Mr. Bellingham, authoritatively, "and bring him to the old woman's without delay. You must not hold him any longer," he continued, speaking to Ruth, and remembering her face now for the first time; "your

dress is dripping wet already. Here! you fellow take him up, d'ye see!"

But the child's hand had nervously clenched Ruth's dress, and she would not have him disturbed. She carried her heavy burden very tenderly towards a mean little cottage indicated by the neighbours; an old crippled woman was coming out of the door shaking all over with agitation.

"Dear heart!" said she, "he's the last of 'em all and he's gone afore me."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Bellingham, "the boy is alive, and likely to live."

But the old woman was helpless and hopeless, and insisted on believing that her grandson was dead and dead he would have been if it had not been for Ruth, and one or two of the more sensible neighbours who, under Mr. Bellingham's directions, bustled about and did all that was necessary until animation was restored.

"What a confounded time these people are in fetching the doctor," said Mr. Bellingham to Ruth, between whom and himself a sort of silent understanding had sprung up from the circumstance of their having been the only two (besides mere children) who had witnessed the accident, and also the only two to whom a certain degree of cultivation had given the power of understanding each other's thought and even each other's words.

"It takes so much to knock an idea into such stupid people's heads. They stood gaping and asking which doctor they were to go for, as if it signfied whether it was Brown or Smith, so long as he had his wits about him. I have no more time to waste

here either; I was on the gallop when I caught sight of the lad; and now he has fairly sobbed and opened his eyes, I see no use in my staying in this stifling atmosphere. May I trouble you with one thing? Will you be so good as to see that the little fellow has all that he wants? If you 'll allow me, I 'll leave you my purse," continued he, giving it to Ruth, who was only too glad to have this power entrusted to her of procuring one or two requisites which she had perceived to be wanted. But she saw some gold between the net-work; she did not like the charge of such riches.

"I shall not want so much, really, Sir. One sovereign will be plenty—more than enough. May I take that out, and I will give you back what is left of it when I see you again? or, perhaps I had better send it to you, Sir?"

"I think you had better keep it all at present. Oh! what a horrid dirty place this is; insufferable two minutes longer. You must not stay here; you 'll be poisoned with this abominable air. Come towards the door, I beg. Well, if you think one sovereign will be enough, I will take my purse; only, remember you apply to me if you think they want more."

They were standing at the door, where some one was holding Mr. Bellingham's horse. Ruth was looking at him with her earnest eyes (Mrs. Mason and her errands quite forgotten in the interest of the afternoon's event), her whole thoughts bent upon rightly understanding and following out his wishes for the little boy's welfare; and until now this had been the first object in his own mind. But at this moment the strong perception of Ruth's exceeding

beauty came again upon him. He almost lost th sense of what he was saying, he was so startled int admiration. The night before, he had not seen he eyes; and now they looked straight and innocentl full at him, grave, earnest, and deep. But whe she instinctively read the change in the expressio of his countenance, she dropped her large whit veiling lids; and he thought her face was lovelie still.

The irresitible impulse seized him to arrang matters so that he might see her again befor long.

"No!" said he. "I see it would be better tha you should keep the purse. Many things may b wanted for the lad which we cannot calculate upo now. If I remember rightly, there are three so vereigns and some loose change; I shall, perhaps see you again in a few days, when, if there be an money left in the purse, you can restore it to me.

"Oh, yes, Sir," said Ruth, alive to the magnitud of the wants to which she might have to administe and yet rather afraid of the responsibility implied i the possession of so much money.

"Is there any chance of my meeting you agai in this house?" asked he.

"I hope to come whenever I can, Sir; but I mu run in errand-times, and I don't know when my tur may be."

"Oh"—he did not fully understand this answe — "I should like to know how you think the bo going on, if it is not giving you too much trouble do you ever take walks?"

"Not for walking's sake, Sir."

"Well!" said he, "you go to church, I suppose? Mrs. Mason does not keep you at work on Sundays, I trust?"

"Oh, no, Sir. I go to church regurlarly."

"Then, perhaps, you will be so good as to tell me what church you go to, and I will meet you there next Sunday afternoon?"

"I go to St. Nicholas', Sir. I will take care and bring you word how the boy is, and what doctor they get; and I will keep an account of the money I spend."

"Very well; thank you. Remember, I trust to you."

He meant that he relied on her promise to meet him; but Ruth thought that he was referring to the responsibility of doing the best she could for the child. He was going away, when a fresh thought struck him, and he turned back into the cottage once more, and addressed Ruth, with a half-smile on his countenance:

"It seems rather strange, but we have no one to introduce us; my name is Bellingham — yours is —?"

"Ruth Hilton, Sir," she answered, in a low voice, for now that the conversation no longer related to the boy, she felt shy and restrained.

He held out his hand to shake hers, and just as she gave it to him, the old grandmother came tottering up to ask some question. The interruption jarred upon him, and made him once more keenly alive to the closeness of the air, and the squalor and dirt by which he was surrounded.

"My good woman," said he to Nelly Brownson, "could you not keep your place a little neater and cleaner? It is more fit for pigs than human beings.

The air in this room is quite offensive, and the c and filth is really disgraceful."

By this time he was mounted, and, bowing to Ru he rode away.

Then the old woman's wrath broke out.

"Who may you be, that knows no better mann than to come into a poor woman's house to abuse — fit for pigs, indeed! What d'ye call yon fellow?

"He is Mr. Bellingham," said Ruth, shocked at t old woman's apparent ingratitude. "It was he tl rode into the water to save your grandson. He wo have been drowned but for Mr. Bellingham. I thou once they would both have been swept away by t current, it was so strong."

"The river is none so deep, either," the old wom said, anxious to diminish as much as possible the c ligation she was under to one who had offended h "Some one else would have saved him, if this fi young spark had never been near. He 's an orph and God watches over orphans, they say. I 'd rath it had been any one else as had picked him out, th one who comes into a poor body's house only abuse it."

"He did not come in only to abuse it," said Ru gently. "He came with little Tom; he only said was not quite so clean as it might be."

"What! you 're taking up the cry, are you? W till you are an old woman like me, crippled with rhe matiz, and a lad to see after like Tom, who is alwa in mud when he isn't in water; and his food a mine to scrape together (God knows we 're often sho and do the best I can), and water to fetch up th steep brow."

She stopped to cough; and Ruth judiciously changed the subject, and began to consult the old woman as to the wants of her grandson, in which consultation they were soon assisted by the medical man.

When Ruth had made one or two arrangements with a neighbour, whom she asked to procure the most necessary things, and had heard from the doctor that all would be right in a day or two, she began to quake at the recollection of the length of time she had spent at Nelly Brownson's, and to remember, with some affright, the strict watch kept by Mrs. Mason over her apprentices' out-goings and in-comings on working-days. She hurried off to the shops, and tried to recal her wandering thoughts to the respective merits of pink and blue as a match to lilac, found she had lost her patterns, and went home with ill-chosen things, and in a fit of despair at her own stupidity.

The truth was, that the afternoon's adventure filled her mind; only, the figure of Tom (who was now safe, and likely to do well) was receding into the background, and that of Mr. Bellingham becoming more prominent than it had been. His spirited and natural action of galloping into the water to save the child, was magnified by Ruth into the most heroic deed of daring; his interest about the boy was tender, thoughtful benevolence in her eyes, and his careless liberality of money was fine generosity; for she forgot that generosity implies some degree of self-denial. She was gratified, too, by the power of dispensing comfort he had entrusted to her, and was busy with Alnaschar visions of wise expenditure, when the necessity of opening Mrs. Mason's house-door summoned her back

into actual present life, and the dread of an immediate scolding.

For this time, however, she was spared; but spared for such a reason that she would have been thankful for some blame in preference to her impunity. During her absence, Jenny's difficulty of breathing had suddenly become worse, and the girls had, on their own responsibility, put her to bed, and were standing round her in dismay, when Mrs. Mason's return home (only a few minutes before Ruth arrived) fluttered them back into the work-room.

And now, all was confusion and hurry; a doctor to be sent for; a mind to be unburdened of directions for a dress to a fore-woman, who was too ill to understand; scoldings to be scattered with no illiberal hand amongst a group of frightened girls, hardly sparing the poor invalid herself for her inopportune illness. In the middle of all this turmoil, Ruth crept quietly to her place, with a heavy saddened heart at the indisposition of the gentle fore-woman. She would gladly have nursed Jenny herself, and often longed to do it, but she could not be spared. Hands, unskilful in fine and delicate work, would be well enough qualified to tend the sick, until the mother arrived from home. Meanwhile, extra diligence was required in the work-room; and Ruth found no opportunity of going to see little Tom, or to fulfil the plans for making him and his grandmother more comfortable, which she had proposed to herself. She regretted her rash promise to Mr. Bellingham, of attending to the little boy's welfare; all that she could do, was done by means of Mrs. *Mason's servant*, through whom she made imquiries, *and sent the* necessary help.

The subject of Jenny's illness was the prominent one in the house. Ruth told of her own adventure, to be sure, but when she was at the very crisis of the boy's fall into the river, the more fresh and vivid interest of some tidings of Jenny was brought into the room, and Ruth ceased, almost blaming herself for caring for anything besides the question of life or death to be decided in that very house.

Then a pale, gentle-looking woman was seen moving softly about; and it was whispered that this was the mother come to nurse her child. Everybody liked her, she was so sweet-looking, and gave so little trouble, and seemed so patient, and so thankful for any inquiries about her daughter, whose illness, it was understood, although its severity was mitigated, was likely to be long and tedious. While all the feelings and thoughts relating to Jenny were predominant, Sunday arrived. Mrs. Mason went the accustomed visit to her father's, making some little show of apology to Mrs. Wood for leaving her and her daughter; the apprentices dispersed to the various friends with whom they were in the habit of spending the day; and Ruth went to St. Nicholas', with a sorrowful heart, depressed on account of Jenny, and self-reproachful at having rashly undertaken what she had been unable to perform.

As she came out of church, she was joined by Mr. Bellingham. She had half hoped that he might have forgotten the arrangement, and yet she wished to relieve herself of her responsibility. She knew his step behind her, and the contending feelings made her heart beat hard, and she longed to run away.

"*Miss Hilton, I believe*," said he, overtaking her,

and bowing forward, so as to catch a sight of her rose-red face. "How is our little sailor going on? Well, I trust, from the symptoms the other day."

"I believe, Sir, he is quite well now. I am very sorry, but I have not been able to go and see him. I am so sorry — I could not help it. But I have got one or two things through another person. I have put them down on this slip of paper; and here is your purse, Sir, for I am afraid I can do nothing more for him. We have illness in the house, and it makes us very busy."

Ruth had been so much accustomed to blame of late, that she almost anticipated some remonstrance or reproach now, for not having fulfilled her promise better. She little guessed that Mr. Bellingham was far more busy trying to devise some excuse for meeting her again, during the silence that succeeded her speech, than displeased with her for not bringing a more particular account of the little boy, in whom he had ceased to feel any interest.

She repeated, after a minute's pause:

"I am very sorry I have done so little, Sir."

"Oh, yes, I am sure you have done all you could. It was thoughtless in me to add to your engagements."

"He is displeased with me," thought Ruth, "for what he believes to have been neglect of the boy, whose life he risked his own to save. If I told all, he would see that I could not do more; but I cannot tell him all the sorrows and worries that have taken up my time."

"*And yet I* am tempted to give you another little *commission, if it* is not taking up too much of your

time, and presuming too much on your good-nature," said he, a bright idea having just struck him. "Mrs. Mason lives in Heneage Place, does not she? My mother's ancestors lived there; and once, when the house was being repaired, she took me in to show me the old place. There was an old hunting-piece painted on a panel over one of the chimney-pieces; the figures were portraits of my ancestors. I have often thought I should like to purchase it, if it still remained there. Can you ascertain this for me, and bring me word next Sunday?"

"Oh, yes, Sir," said Ruth, glad that this commission was completely within her power to execute, and anxious to make up for her previous seeming neglect. "I 'll look directly I get home, and ask Mrs. Mason to write and let you know."

"Thank you," said he, only half satisfied; "I think perhaps, however, it might be as well not to trouble Mrs. Mason about it; you see, it would compromise me, and I am not quite determined to purchase the picture; if you would ascertain whether the painting is there, and tell me, I would take a little time to reflect, and afterwards I could apply to Mrs. Mason myself."

"Very well, Sir, I will see about it." So they parted.

Before the next Sunday, Mrs. Wood had taken her daughter to her distant home, to recruit in that quiet place. Ruth watched her down the street from an upper window, and, sighing deep and long, returned to the work-room, whence the warning voice and the *gentle wisdom had* departed.

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Bellingham attended afternoon service at St. Nicholas' church the next Sunday. His thoughts had been far more occupied by Ruth than hers by him, although his appearance upon the scene of her life was more an event to her than it was to him. He was puzzled by the impression she had produced on him, though he did not in general analyse the nature of his feelings, but simply enjoyed them with the delight which youth takes in experiencing new and strong emotion.

He was old compared to Ruth, but young as a man; hardly three-and-twenty. The fact of his being an only child had given him, as it does to many, a sort of inequality in those parts of the character which are usually formed by the number of years that a person has lived.

The unevenness of discipline to which only children are subjected; the thwarting, resulting from over-anxiety; the indiscreet indulgence, arising from a love centred all in one object; had been exaggerated in his education, probably from the circumstance that his mother (his only surviving parent) had been similarly situated to himself.

He was already in possession of the comparatively small property he inherited from his father. The *estate on which* his mother lived was her own; and *her income* gave her the means of indulging or con

trolling him, after he had grown to man's estate, as her wayward disposition and her love of power prompted her.

Had he been double-dealing in his conduct towards her, had he condescended to humour her in the least, her passionate love for him would have induced her to strip herself of all her possessions to add to his dignity or happiness. But although he felt the warmest affection for her, the regardlessness which she had taught him (by example, perhaps, more than by precept) of the feelings of others, was continually prompting him to do things that she, for the time being, resented as mortal affronts. He would mimic the clergyman she specially esteemed, even to his very face; he would refuse to visit her schools for months and months, and, when wearied into going at last, revenge himself by puzzling the children with the most ridiculous questions (gravely put) that he could imagine.

All these boyish tricks annoyed and irritated her far more than the accounts which reached her of more serious misdoings at college and in town. Of these grave offences she never spoke; of the smaller misdeeds she hardly ever ceased speaking.

Still, at times, she had great influence over him, and nothing delighted her more than to exercise it. The submission of his will to hers was sure to be liberally rewarded; for it gave her great happiness to extort, from his indifference or his affection, the concessions which she never sought by force of reason, or by appeals to principle — concessions which he frequently withheld, solely for the sake of asserting his independence of her control.

She was anxious for him to marry Miss Duncombe. He cared little or nothing about it — it was time enough to be married ten years hence; and so he was dawdling through some months of his life — sometimes flirting with the nothing-loth Miss Duncombe, sometimes plaguing, and sometimes delighting his mother, at all times taking care to please himself — when he first saw Ruth Hilton, and a new, passionate, hearty feeling shot through his whole being. He did not know why he was so fascinated by her. She was very beautiful, but he had seen others equally beautiful, and with many more *agaceries* calculated to set off the effect of their charms.

There was, perhaps, something bewitching in the union of the grace and loveliness of womanhood with the *naïveté*, simplicity, and innocence of an intelligent child. There was a spell in the shyness, which made her avoid and shun all admiring approaches to acquaintance. It would be an exquisite delight to attract and tame her wildness, just as he had often allured and tamed the timid fawns in his mother's park.

By no over-bold admiration, or rash, passionate word, would he startle her; and, surely, in time she might be induced to look upon him as a friend, if not something nearer and dearer still.

In accordance with this determination, he resisted the strong temptation of walking by her side the whole distance home after church. He only received the intelligence she brought respecting the panel with thanks, spoke a few words about the weather, bowed, and was gone. Ruth believed she should never see him again; and, in spite of sundry self-upbraidings for her folly, she could not help feeling as if a sha-

dow were drawn over her existence for several days to come.

Mrs. Mason was a widow, and had to struggle for the sake of the six or seven children left dependent on her exertions; thus there was some reason, and great excuse, for the pinching economy which regulated her household affairs.

On Sundays she chose to conclude that all her apprentices had friends who would be glad to see them to dinner, and give them a welcome reception for the remainder of the day; while she, and those of her children who were not at school, went to spend the day at her father's house, several miles out of the town. Accordingly, no dinner was cooked on Sundays for the young work-women; no fires were lighted in any rooms to which they had access. On this morning they breakfasted in Mrs. Mason's own parlour, after which the room was closed against them through the day by some understood, though unspoken prohibition.

What became of such as Ruth, who had no home and no friends in that large populous desolate town? She had hitherto commissioned the servant, who went to market on Saturdays for the family, to buy her a bun or biscuit, whereon she made her fasting dinner in the deserted work-room; sitting in her walking-dress to keep off the cold, which clung to her in spite of shawl and bonnet. Then she would sit at the window, looking out on the dreary prospect till her eyes were often blinded by tears; and, partly to shake off thoughts and recollections, the indulgence in which she felt to be productive of no good, and partly to have some ideas to dwell upon during the coming

week beyond those suggested by the constant view of the same room, she would carry her Bible, and place herself in the window-seat on the wide landing, which commanded the street in front of the house. From thence she could see the irregular grandeur of the place; she caught a view of the grey church-tower, rising hoary and massive into mid-air; she saw one or two figures loiter along on the sunny side of the street, in all the enjoyment of their fine clothes and Sunday leisure; and she imagined histories for them, and tried to picture to herself their homes and their daily doings.

And before long, the bells swung heavily in the church-tower, and struck out with musical clang the first summons to afternoon church.

After church was over, she used to return home to the same window-seat, and watch till the winter twilight was over and gone, and the stars came out over the black masses of houses. And then she would steal down to ask for a candle, as a companion to her in the deserted work-room. Occasionally the servant would bring her up some tea; but of late Ruth had declined, taking any, as she had discovered she was robbing the kind-hearted creature of part of the small provision left out for her by Mrs. Mason. She sat on, hungry and cold, trying to read her Bible, and to think the old holy thoughts which had been her childish meditations at her mother's knee, until one after another the apprentices returned, weary with their day's enjoyment, and their week's late watching; too weary to make her in any way a partaker of their *pleasure by* entering into details of the manner in *which they* had spent their day.

And last of all, Mrs. Mason returned; and, summoning her "young people" once more into the parlour, she read a prayer before dismissing them to bed. She always expected to find them all in the house when she came home, but asked no questions as to their proceedings through the day; perhaps, because she dreaded to hear that one or two had occasionally nowhere to go, and that it would be sometimes necessary to order a Sunday's dinner, and leave a lighted fire on that day.

For five months Ruth had been an inmate at Mrs. Mason's, and such had been the regular order of the Sundays. While the fore-woman stayed there, it is true, she was ever ready to give Ruth the little variety of hearing of recreations in which she was no partaker; and however tired Jenny might be at night, she had ever some sympathy to bestow on Ruth for the dull length of day she had passed. After her departure, the monotonous idleness of the Sunday seemed worse to bear than the incessant labour of the work-days; until the time came when it seemed to be a recognised hope in her mind, that on Sunday afternoons she should see Mr. Bellingham, and hear a few words from him, as from a friend who took an interest in her thoughts and proceedings during the past week.

Ruth's mother had been the daughter of a poor curate in Norfolk, and, early left without parents or home, she was thankful to marry a respectable farmer, a good deal older than herself. After their marriage, however, everything seemed to go wrong. Mrs. Hilton *fell into a delicate state* of health, and was unable *to bestow the ever-watchful* attention to domestic

affairs, so requisite in a farmer's wife. Her husban had a series of misfortunes — of a more importan kind than the death of a whole brood of turkeys fron getting among the nettles, or the year of bad cheese spoilt by a careless dairy-maid — which were the con sequences (so the neighbours said) of Mr. Hilton' mistake in marrying a delicate, fine lady. His crop failed; his horses died; his barn took fire; in short, i he had been in any way a remarkable character, on might have supposed him to be the object of a avenging fate, so successive were the evils which pur sued him; but as he was only a somewhat common place farmer, I believe we must attribute his calami ties to some want in his character of the one qualit required to act as key-stone to many excellencies While his wife lived, all worldly misfortunes seeme as nothing to him; her strong sense and lively facult of hope upheld him from despair; her sympathy wa always ready, and the invalid's room had an atmo sphere of peace and encouragement, which affected al who entered it. But when Ruth was about twelv one morning in the busy hay-time, Mrs. Hilton wa left alone for some hours. This had often happene before, nor had she seemed weaker than usual whe they had gone forth to the field; but on their return with merry voices, to fetch the dinner prepared fo the haymakers, they found an unusual silence brood ing over the house; no low voice called out gently t welcome them, and ask after the day's progress; and on entering the little parlour, which was called Mrs Hilton's and was sacred to her, they found her lyin dead on her accustomed sofa. Quite calm and peace ful she lay; there had been no struggle at last; th

struggle was for the survivors, and one sank under it. Her husband did not make much ado at first, at least, not in outward show; her memory seemed to keep in check all external violence of grief; but, day by day, dating from his wife's death, his mental powers decreased. He was still a hale-looking elderly man, and his bodily health appeared as good as ever; but he sat for hours in his easy-chair, looking into the fire, not moving, nor speaking unless when it was absolutely necessary to answer repeated questions. If Ruth, with coaxings and draggings, induced him to come out with her, he went with measured steps around his fields, his head bent to the ground with the same abstracted, unseeing look; never smiling — never changing the expression of his face, not even to one of deeper sadness, when anything occurred which might be supposed to remind him of his dead wife. But in this abstraction from all outward things, his worldly affairs went ever lower down. He paid money away, or received it, as if it had been so much water; the gold mines of Potosi could not have touched the deep grief of his soul; but God in His mercy knew the sure balm, and sent the Beautiful Messenger to take the weary one home.

After his death, the creditors were the chief people who appeared to take any interest in the affairs; and it seemed strange to Ruth to see people, whom she scarcely knew, examining and touching all that she had been accustomed to consider as precious and sacred. Her father had made his will at her birth. With the pride of newly and late-acquired paternity, he had considered the office of guardian to his little darling as one which would have been an additional honour to

the lord-lieutenant of the county; but as he had no the pleasure of his lordship's acquaintance, he selected the person of most consequence amongst those whom he did know; not any very ambitious appointment, in those days of comparative prosperity; but certainly the flourishing maltster of Skelton was a little surprised when, fifteen years later, he learnt that he was executor to a will bequeathing many vanished hundreds of pounds, and guardian to a young girl whom he could not remember ever to have seen.

He was a sensible, hard-headed man of the world having a very fair proportion of conscience as consciences go; indeed, perhaps more than many people for he had some ideas of duty extending to the circle beyond his own family; and did not, as some would have done, decline acting altogether, but speedily summoned the creditors, examined into the accounts, sold up the farming-stock, and discharged all the debts paid about 80*l.* into the Skelton bank for a week while he inquired for a situation or apprenticeship of some kind for poor heart-broken Ruth; heard of Mrs Mason's, arranged all with her in two short conversations; drove over for Ruth in his gig; waited while she and the old servant packed up her clothes, and grew very impatient while she ran, with her eyes streaming with tears, round the garden, tearing off in a passion of love whole boughs of favourite China and damask roses, late flowering against the casement window of what had been her mother's room. When she took her seat in the gig, she was little able, even if she had been inclined, to profit by her guardian's lectures on economy and self-reliance; but she was quiet and silent, looking forward with longing to the

night-time, when, in her bedroom, she might give way to all her passionate sorrow at being wrenched from the home where she had lived with her parents, in that utter absence of any anticipation of change, which is either the blessing or the curse of childhood. But at night there were four other girls in her room, and she could not cry before them. She watched and waited till one by one dropped off to sleep, and then she buried her face in the pillow, and shook with sobbing grief; and then she paused to conjure up, with fond luxuriance, every recollection of the happy days, so little valued in their uneventful peace while they lasted, so passionately regretted when once gone for ever; to remember every look and word of the dear mother, and to moan afresh over the change caused by her death; — the first clouding in of Ruth's day of life. It was Jenny's sympathy on this first night, when awakened by Ruth's irrepressible agony, that had made the bond between them. But Ruth's loving disposition, continually sending forth fibres in search of nutriment, found no other object for regard among those of her daily life to compensate for the want of natural ties.

But, almost insensibly, Jenny's place in Ruth's heart was filled up; there was some one who listened with tender interest to all her little revelations; who questioned her about her early days of happiness, and, in return, spoke of his own childhood — not so golden in reality as Ruth's but more dazzling, when recounted with stories of the beautiful cream-coloured Arabian pony, and the old picture-gallery in the house, and avenues, and terraces, and fountains in the garden, for Ruth to paint, with all the vividness of imagina-

tion, as scenery and background for the figure which was growing by slow degrees most prominent in her thoughts.

It must not be supposed that this was effected all at once, though the intermediate stages have been passed over. On Sunday, Mr. Bellingham only spoke to her to receive the information about the panel; nor did he come to St. Nicholas' the next, nor yet the following Sunday. But the third he walked by her side a little way, and, seeing her annoyance, he left her; and then she wished for him back again, and found the day very dreary, and wondered why a strange undefined feeling had made her imagine she was doing wrong in walking alongside of one so kind and good as Mr. Bellingham; it had been very foolish of her to be self-conscious all the time, and if ever he spoke to her again she would not think of what people might say, but enjoy the pleasure which his kind words and evident interest in her might give. Then she thought it was very likely he never would notice her again for she knew that she had been very rude with her short answers; it was very provoking that she had behaved so rudely. She should be sixteen in another month, and she was still childish and awkward. Thus she lectured herself, after parting with Mr. Bellingham; and the consequence was, that on the following Sunday she was ten times as blushing and conscious and (Mr. Bellingham thought) ten times more beautiful than ever. He suggested, that instead of going straight home through High-street, she should take the round by the Leasowes; at first she declined, but *then, suddenly* wondering and questioning herself why *she refused* a thing which was, as far as reason and

knowledge (*her* knowledge) went, so innocent, and which was certainly so tempting and pleasant, she agreed to go the round; and when she was once in the meadows that skirted the town, she forgot all doubt and awkwardness — nay, almost forgot the presence of Mr. Bellingham — in her delight at the new tender beauty of an early spring day in February. Among the last year's brown ruins, heaped together by the wind in the hedgerows, she found the fresh green crinkled leaves and pale star-like flowers of the primroses. Here and there a golden celandine made brilliant the sides of the little brook that (full of water in "February fill-dyke") bubbled along by the side of the path; the sun was low in the horizon, and once, when they came to a higher part of the Leasowes, Ruth burst into an exclamation of delight at the evening glory of mellow light which was in the sky behind the purple distance, while the brown leafless woods in the foreground derived an almost metallic lustre from the golden mist and haze of sunset. It was but three-quarters of a mile round by the meadows, but somehow it took them an hour to walk it. Ruth turned to thank Mr. Bellingham for his kindness in taking her home by this beautiful way, but his look of admiration at her glowing, animated face made her suddenly silent; and, hardly wishing him good-by, she quickly entered the house with a beating, happy, agitated heart.

"How strange it is," she thought that evening, "that I should feel as if this charming afternoon's walk were, somehow, not exactly wrong, but yet as if it were not right. Why can it be? I am not defrauding Mrs. Mason of any of her time; that I know would be

wrong; I am left to go where I like on Sundays; have been to church, so it can't be because I ha missed doing my duty. If I had gone this walk w Jenny, I wonder whether I should have felt as I now. There must be something wrong in me, mys to feel so guilty when I have done nothing which not right; and yet I can thank God for the happin I have had in this charming spring walk, which d mamma used to say was a sign when pleasures w innocent and good for us."

She was not conscious, as yet, that Mr. Bellin ham's presence had added any charm to the ramb and when she might have become aware of this, week after week, Sunday after Sunday, loitering ram after loitering ramble succeeded each other, she w too much absorbed with one set of thoughts to ha much inclination for self-questioning.

"Tell me everything, Ruth, as you would to brother; let me help you, if I can, in your difficultie he said to her one afternoon. And he really did to understand, and to realise, how an insignificant a paltry person like Mason the dressmaker could be object of dread, and regarded as a person having a thority, by Ruth. He flamed up with indignation wh by way of impressing him with Mrs. Mason's pow and consequence, Ruth spoke of some instance of effects of her employer's displeasure. He declared mother should never have a gown made again by su a tyrant — such a Mrs. Brownrigg; that he would p vent all his acquaintances from going to such a cr dressmaker; till Ruth was alarmed at the threate consequences of her one-sided account, and plea for Mrs. Mason as earnestly as if a young man's r

nace of this description were likely to be literally fulfilled.

"Indeed, Sir, I have been very wrong; if you please, Sir, don't be so angry. She is often very good to us; it is only sometimes she goes into a passion; and we are very provoking, I dare say. I know I am for one. I have often to undo my work, and you can't think how it spoils anything (particularly silk) to be unpicked; and Mrs. Mason has to bear all the blame. Oh! I am sorry I said anything about it. Don't speak to your mother about it, pray, Sir. Mrs. Mason thinks so much of Mrs. Bellingham's custom."

"Well, I won't this time" — recollecting that there might be some awkwardness in accounting to his mother for the means by which he had obtained his very correct information as to what passed in Mrs. Mason's work-room — "but if ever she does so again, I 'll not answer for myself."

"I will take care and not tell again, Sir," said Ruth, in a low voice.

"Nay, Ruth, you are not going to have secrets from me, are you? Don't you remember your promise to consider me as a brother? Go on, telling me everything that happens to you, pray; you cannot think how much interest I take in all your interests. I can quite fancy that charming home at Milham you told me about last Sunday. I can almost fancy Mrs. Mason's work-room; and that, surely, is a proof either of the strength of my imagination, or of your powers of description."

Ruth smiled. "It is, indeed, Sir. Our work-room must be so different to anything you ever saw. I think you must have passed through Milham often on your way to Lowford."

"Then you don't think it is any stretch of fancy have so clear an idea as I have of Milham Grange. (the left hand of the road, is it, Ruth?"

"Yes, Sir, just over the bridge, and up the h where the elm-trees meet overhead and make a gre shade; and then comes the dear old Grange, that I sh never see again."

"Never! Nonsense, Ruthie; it is only six miles o you may see it any day. It is not an hour's ride."

"Perhaps I may see it again when I am grown ol I did not think exactly what 'never' meant; it is very long since I was there, and I don't see any chan of my going for years and years, at any rate."

"Why, Ruth, you — we may go next Sunday afte noon, if you like."

She looked up at him with a lovely light of pleasu in her face at the idea. "How, Sir? Can I walk between afternoon-service and the time Mrs. Mas comes home? I would go for only one glimpse; b if I could get into the house — oh, Sir! if I could ju see mamma's room again!"

He was revolving plans in his head for giving h this pleasure, and he had also his own in view. If th went in any of his carriages, the loitering charm of t walk would be lost; and they must, to a certain degr be encumbered by, and exposed to, the notice of se vants.

"Are you a good walker, Ruth? Do you think y can manage six miles? If we set off at two o'cloc we shall be there by four, without hurrying; or s half-past four. Then we might stay two hours, a you could show me all the old walks and old plac

you love, and we could still come leisurely home. Oh, it's all arranged directly!"

"But do you think it would be right, Sir? It seems as if it would be such a great pleasure, that it must be in some way wrong."

"Why, you little goose, what can be wrong in it?"

"In the first place, I miss going to church by setting out at two," said Ruth, a little gravely.

"Only for once. Surely you don't see any harm in missing church for once? You will go in the morning, you know."

"I wonder if Mrs. Mason would think it right — if she would allow it?"

"No, I dare say not. But you don't mean to be governed by Mrs. Mason's notions of right and wrong. She thought it right to treat that poor girl Palmer in the way you told me about. You would think that wrong, you know, and so would every one of sense and feeling. Come, Ruth, don't pin your faith on any one, but judge for yourself. The pleasure is perfectly innocent; it is not a selfish pleasure either, for I shall enjoy it to the full as much as you will. I shall like to see the places where you spent your childhood; I shall almost love them as much as you do." He had dropped his voice; and spoke in low, persuasive tones. Ruth hung down her head, and blushed with exceeding happiness; but she could not speak, even to urge her doubts afresh. Thus it was in a manner settled.

How delightfully happy the plan made her through the coming week! She was too young when her mother died to have received any cautions or words of advice respecting *the* subject of a woman's life—if, indeed, wise parents ever directly speak of what, in

its depth and power, cannot be put into words—which is a brooding spirit with no definite form or shape that men should know it, but which is there, and present before we have recognised and realised its existence. Ruth was innocent and snow-pure. She had heard of falling in love, but did not know the signs and symptoms thereof; nor, indeed, had she troubled her head much about them. Sorrow had filled up her days, to the exclusion of all lighter thoughts than the consideration of present duties, and the remembrance of the happy time which had been But the interval of blank, after the loss of her mother and during her father's life-in-death, had made her all the more ready to value and cling to sympathy—first from Jenny, and now from Mr. Bellingham. To see her home again, and to see it with him; to show him (secure of his interest) the haunts of former times each with its little tale of the past—of dead and gone events!—No coming shadow threw its gloom over this week's dream of happiness—a dream which was too bright to be spoken about, to common and indifferent ears.

CHAPTER IV.

SUNDAY came, as brilliant as if there were no sorrow, or death, or guilt in the world; a day or two of rain had made the earth fresh and brave as the blue heavens above. Ruth thought it was too strong a realisation of her hopes, and looked for an over-clouding at noon; but the glory endured, and at two o'clock she was in the Leasowes, with a beating heart full of joy, longing to stop the hours, which would pass too quickly through the afternoon.

They sauntered through the fragrant lanes, as if their loitering would prolong the time, and check the fiery-footed steeds galloping apace towards the close of the happy day. It was past five o'clock before they came to the great mill-wheel, which stood in Sabbath idleness, motionless in a brown mass of shade, and still wet with yesterday's immersion in the deep transparent water beneath. They clambered the little hill, not yet fully shaded by the overarching elms; and then Ruth checked Mr. Bellingham, by a slight motion of the hand which lay within his arm, and glanced up into his face to see what that face should express as it looked on Milham Grange, now lying still and peaceful in its afternoon shadows. It was a house of after-thoughts; building materials were plentiful in the neighbourhood, and every successive owner had found a necessity for some addition or

projection, till it was a picturesque mass of irregularity — of broken light and shadow — which, as a whole, gave a full and complete idea of a "Home." All its gables and nooks were blended and held together by the tender green of the climbing roses and young creepers. An old couple were living in the house until it should be let, but they dwelt in the back part, and never used the front door; so the little birds had grown tame and familiar, and perched upon the window-sills and porch, and on the old stone cistern which caught the water from the roof.

They went silently through the untrimmed garden, full of the pale-coloured flowers of spring. A spider had spread her web over the front door. The sight of this conveyed a sense of desolation to Ruth's heart; she thought it was possible the state-entrance had never been used since her father's dead body had been borne forth, and; without speaking a word, she turned abruptly away, and went round the house to another door. Mr. Bellingham followed without questioning little understanding her feelings, but full of admiration for the varying expression called out upon her face.

The old woman had not yet returned from church, or from the weekly gossip or neighbourly tea which succeeded. The husband sat in the kitchen, spelling the psalms for the day in his Prayerbook, and reading the words out aloud — a habit he had acquired from the double solitude of his life, for he was deaf. He did not hear the quiet entrance of the pair, and they were struck with the sort of ghostly echo which seems to haunt half-furnished and uninhabited houses. The verses he was reading were the following:

"Why art thou so vexed, O my soul: and why art thou so disquieted within me?

"O put thy trust in God: for I will yet thank him, which is the help of my countenance, and my God."

And when he had finished he shut the book, and sighed with the satisfaction of having done his duty. The words of holy trust, though perhaps they were not fully understood, carried a faithful peace down into the depths of his soul. As he looked up, he saw the young couple standing on the middle of the floor. He pushed his iron-rimmed spectacles on to his forehead, and rose to greet the daughter of his old master and ever-honoured mistress.

"God bless thee, lass; God bless thee! My old eyes are glad to see thee again."

Ruth sprang forward to shake the horny hand stretched forward in the action of blessing. She pressed it between both of hers, as she rapidly poured out questions. Mr. Bellingham was not altogether comfortable at seeing one whom he had already begun to appropriate as his own, so tenderly familiar with a hard-featured, meanly-dressed day-labourer. He sauntered to the window, and looked out into the grass-grown farm-yard; but he could not help overhearing some of the conversation, which seemed to him carried on too much in the tone of equality. "And who 's yon?" asked the old labourer at last. "Is he your sweetheart? Your missis's son, I reckon. He 's a spruce young chap, any how."

Mr. Bellingham's "blood of all the Howards" rose and tingled about his ears, so that he could not hear Ruth's answer. It began by "Hush, Thomas;

pray hush!" but how it went on he did not catch The idea of his being Mrs. Mason's son! It was really too ridiculous; but, like most things which are "too ridiculous," it made him very angry. He was hardly himself again when Ruth shyly came to the window-recess and asked him if he would like to see the house-place, into which the front door entered; many people thought it very pretty, she said, half timidly, for his face had unconsciously assumed a hard and haughty expression, which he could not instantly soften down. He followed her however; but before he left the kitchen he saw the old man standing, looking at Ruth's companion with a strange, grave air of dissatisfaction.

They went along one or two zig-zag, damp-smelling stone passages, and then entered the house-place, a common sitting-room for a farmer's family in that part of the country. The front door opened into it, and several other apartments issued out of it, such as the dairy, the state bedroom (which was half-parlour as well), and a small room which had been appropriated to the late Mrs. Hilton, where she sat, or more frequently lay, commanding through the open door the comings and goings of her household. In those days the house-place had been a cheerful room, full of life, with the passing to and fro of husband, children and servants; with a great merry wood-fire crackling and blazing away every evening, and hardly let out in the very heat of summer; for with the thick stone walls, and the deep window-seats, and the drapery of vine-leaves and ivy, that room, with its flag-floor, seemed always to want the sparkle and cheery warmth *of a fire.* But now the green shadows from without

seemed to have become black in the uninhabited desolation. The oaken shovel-board, the heavy dresser, and the carved cupboards, were now dull and damp, which were formerly polished up to the brightness of a looking-glass, where the fire-blaze was for ever glinting; they only added to the oppressive gloom; the flag-floor was wet with heavy moisture. Ruth stood gazing into the room, seeing nothing of what was present. She saw a vision of former days — an evening in the days of her childhood; her father sitting in the "master's corner" near the fire, sedately smoking his pipe, while he dreamily watched his wife and child; her mother reading to her, as she sat on a little stool at her feet. It was gone — all gone into the land of shadows; but for the moment it seemed so present in the old room, that Ruth believed her actual life to be the dream. Then still silent, she went on into her mother's parlour. But there, the bleak look of what had once been full of peace and mother's love, struck cold on her heart. She uttered a cry, and threw herself down by the sofa, hiding her face in her hands, while her frame quivered with her repressed sobs.

"Dearest Ruth, don't give way so. It can do no good; it cannot bring back the dead," said Mr. Bellingham, distressed at witnessing her distress.

"I know it cannot," murmured Ruth; "and that is why I cry. I cry because nothing will ever bring them back again." She sobbed afresh, but more gently, for his kind words soothed her, and softened, if they could not take away, her sense of desolation.

"*Come away; I* cannot have you stay here, full *of painful associations* as these rooms must be. Come"

— raising her with gentle violence — "show me
little garden you have often told me about. Nea
window of this very room, is it not? See how w
remember everything you tell me."

He led her round through the back part o
house into the pretty old-fashioned garden. T
was a sunny border just under the windows, and
ped box and yew-trees by the grass-plat, further
from the house; and she prattled again of her chi
adventures and solitary plays. When they tu
round they saw the old man, who had hobbled
with the help of his stick, and was looking at
with the same grave, sad look of anxiety.

Mr. Bellingham spoke rather sharply.

"Why does that old man follow us about in
way? It is excessively impertinent of him, I thin

"Oh, don't call old Thomas impertinent. He
good and kind, he is like a father to me. I reme
sitting on his knee many and many a time when I
a child, whilst he told me stories out of the 'Pilg
Progress.' He taught me to suck up milk through a s
Mamma was very fond of him too. He used to sit wi
always in the evenings when papa was away at ma
for mamma was rather afraid of having no man i
house, and used to beg old Thomas to stay; an
would take me on his knee, and listen just as a
tively as I did while mamma read aloud."

"You don't mean to say you have sat upon
old fellow's knee?"

"Oh, yes! many and many a time."

Mr. Bellingham looked graver than he had
while witnessing Ruth's passionate emotion in
mother's room. But he lost his sense of indigni

admiration of his companion as she wandered among the flowers, seeking for favourite bushes or plants, to which some history or remembrance was attached. She wound in and out in natural, graceful, wavy lines between the luxuriant and overgrown shrubs, which were fragrant with a leafy smell of spring growth; she went on, careless of watching eyes, indeed unconscious, for the time, of their existence. Once she stopped to take hold of a spray of jessamine, and softly kiss it; it had been her mother's favourite flower.

Old Thomas was standing by the horse-mount, and was also an observer of all her goings on. But, while Mr. Bellingham's feeling was that of passionate admiration mingled with a selfish kind of love, the old man gazed with tender anxiety, and his lips moved in words of blessing:

"She 's a pretty creature, with a glint of her mother about her; and she 's the same kind lass as ever. Not a bit set up with yon fine manty-maker's shop she 's in. I misdoubt that young fellow though, for all she called him a real gentleman, and checked me when I asked if he was her sweetheart. If his are not sweetheart's looks, I 've forgotten all my young days. Here! they 're going, I suppose. Look! he wants her to go without a word to the old man; but she is none so changed as that, I reckon."

Not Ruth, indeed! She never perceived the dissatisfied expression of Mr. Bellingham's countenance, visible to the old man's keen eye; but came running up to Thomas to send her love to his wife, and to shake him many times by the hand.

"*Tell Mary I 'll make* her such a fine gown, *as soon as ever I set up for* myself; it shall be all in the

fashion, big gigot sleeves, that she shall not know herself in them! Mind you tell her that, Thomas, will you?"

"Ay, that I will, lass; and I reckon she'll be pleased to hear thou hast not forgotten thy old merry ways. The Lord bless thee — the Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon thee."

Ruth was half-way towards the impatient Mr. Bellingham when her old friend called her back. He longed to give her a warning of the danger that he thought she was in, and yet he did not know how. When she came up, all he could think of to say was a text; indeed, the language of the Bible was the language in which he thought, whenever his ideas went beyond practical every-day life into expressions of emotion or feeling. "My dear, remember the devil goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour: remember that, Ruth."

The words fell on her ear, but gave no definite idea. The utmost they suggested was the remembrance of the dread she felt as a child when this verse came into her mind, and how she used to imagine a lion's head with glaring eyes peering out of the bushes in a dark shady part of the wood, which, for this reason, she had always avoided, and even now could hardly think of without a shudder. She never imagined that the grim warning related to the handsome young man who awaited her with a countenance beaming with love, and tenderly drew her hand within his arm.

The old man sighed as he watched them away. "The Lord may help her to guide her steps aright. He may. But I'm afeard she's treading in perilous *places. I'll put* my missis up to going to the town

and getting speech of her, and telling her a bit of her danger. An old motherly woman like our Mary will set about it better nor a stupid fellow like me."

The poor old labourer prayed long and earnestly that night for Ruth. He called it "wrestling for her soul;" and I think that his prayers were heard, for "God judgeth not as man judgeth."

Ruth went on her way, all unconscious of the dark phantoms of the future that were gathering around her; her melancholy turned, with the pliancy of childish years, at sixteen not yet lost, into a softened manner which was infinitely charming. By-and-by she cleared up into sunny happiness. The evening was still and full of mellow light, and the new-born summer was so delicious that, in common with all young creatures, she shared its influence and was glad.

They stood together at the top of a steep ascent, "the hill" of the hundred. At the summit there was a level space, sixty or seventy yards square, of unenclosed and broken ground, over which the golden bloom of the gorse cast a rich hue, while its delicious scent perfumed the fresh and nimble air. On one side of this common, the ground sloped down to a clear bright pond, in which were mirrored the rough sand-cliffs that rose abrupt on the opposite bank; hundreds of martens found a home there, and were now wheeling over the transparent water, and dipping in their wings in their evening sport. Indeed, all sorts of birds seemed to haunt the lonely pool; the water wagtails were scattered around its margin, the linnets perched on the topmost sprays of the gorse-bushes, and *other hidden warblers* sang their vespers on the *uneven ground beyond.* On the far side of the green

waste, close by the road, and well placed for the requirements of horses or their riders who might be weary with the ascent of the hill, there was a public-house, which was more of a farm than an inn. It was a long, low building, rich in dormer-windows on the weather side, which were necessary in such an exposed situation, and with odd projections and unlooked-for gables on every side; there was a deep porch in front on whose hospitable benches a dozen persons might sit and enjoy the balmy air. A noble sycamore grew right before the house, with seats all round it ("such tents the patriarchs loved"); and a nondescript sign hung from a branch on the side next to the road which, being wisely furnished with an interpretation was found to mean King Charles in the oak.

Near this comfortable, quiet, unfrequented inn there was another pond, for household and farm-yard purposes, from which the cattle were drinking, before returning to the fields after they had been milked. Their very motions were so lazy and slow, that they served to fill up the mind with the sensations of dreamy rest. Ruth and Mr. Bellingham plunged through the broken ground to regain the road near the way-side inn. Hand-in-hand, now pricked by the far spreading gorse, now ankle-deep in sand; now pressing the soft, thick heath, which should make so brave an autumn show; and now over wild thyme and other fragrant herbs, they made their way, with many a merry laugh. Once on the road, at the summit, Ruth stood silent, in breathless delight at the view before her. The hill fell suddenly down into the plain, extending for a dozen miles or more. There was a clump *of dark Scotch* firs close to them, which cut off

against the western sky, and threw back the nearest levels into distance. The plain below them was richly wooded, and was tinted by the young tender hues of the earliest summer, for all the trees of the wood had donned their leaves except the cautious ash, which here and there gave a soft, pleasant greyness to the landscape. Far away in the champaign were spires, and towers, and stacks of chimneys belonging to some distant hidden farm-house, which were traced downwards through the golden air by the thin columns of blue smoke sent up from the evening fires. The view was bounded by some rising ground in deep purple shadow against the sunset sky.

When first they stopped, silent with sighing pleasure, the air seemed full of pleasant noises; distant church-bells made harmonious music with the little singing-birds near at hand; nor were the lowings of the cattle, nor the calls of the farm-servants discordant, for the voices seemed to be hushed by the brooding consciousness of the Sabbath. They stood loitering before the house, quietly enjoying the view. The clock in the little inn struck eight, and it sounded clear and sharp in the stillness.

"Can it be so late?" asked Ruth.

"I should not have thought it possible," answered Mr. Bellingham. "But, never mind, you will be at home long before nine. Stay, there is a shorter road, I know, through the fields; just wait a moment, while I go in and ask the exact way." He dropped Ruth's arm, and went into the public-house.

A gig had been slowly toiling up the sandy hill behind, *unperceived by* the young couple, and now it *reached the table-land*, and was close upon them as

they separated. Ruth turned round, when the sou of the horse's footsteps came distinctly as he reach the level. She faced Mrs. Mason!

They were not ten — no, not five yards apa At the same moment they recognised each other, an what was worse, Mrs. Mason had clearly seen, wi her sharp, needle-like eyes, the attitude in which Ru had stood with the young man who had just quitt her. Ruth's hand had been lying in his arm, a fondly held there by his other hand.

Mrs. Mason was careless about the circumstanc of temptation into which the girls entrusted to her apprentices were thrown, but severely intolerant their conduct was in any degree influenced by t force of these temptations. She called this intoleran "keeping up the character of her establishment." would have been a better and more Christian thing, she had kept up the character of her girls by tend vigilance and maternal care.

This evening, too, she was in an irritated state temper. Her brother had undertaken to drive h round by Henbury, in order to give her the unple sant information of the misbehaviour of her eldest sc who was an assistant in a draper's shop in a neig bouring town. She was full of indignation agai want of steadiness, though not willing to direct h indignation against the right object — her ne'er-d well darling. While she was thus charged with ang (for her brother justly defended her son's master a companions from her attacks), she saw Ruth standi with a lover, far away from home, at such a time *the evening*, and she boiled over with intemper *displeasure.*

"Come here directly, Miss Hilton," she exclaimed, sharply. Then, dropping her voice to low, bitter tones of concentrated wrath, she said to the trembling, guilty Ruth:

"Don't attempt to show your face at my house again after this conduct. I saw you, and your spark too. I'll have no slurs on the character of my apprentices. Don't say a word. I saw enough. I shall write and tell your guardian to-morrow."

The horse started away, for he was impatient to be off, and Ruth was left standing there, stony, sick, and pale, as if the lightning had torn up the ground beneath her feet. She could not go on standing, she was so sick and faint; she staggered back to the broken sand-bank, and sank down, and covered her face with her hands.

"My dearest Ruth! are you ill? Speak, darling! My love, my love, do speak to me!"

What tender words after such harsh ones! They loosened the fountain of Ruth's tears, and she cried bitterly.

"Oh! did you see her — did you hear what she said?"

"She! Who, my darling? Don't sob so, Ruth; tell me what it is. Who has been near you? — who has been speaking to you to make you cry so?"

"Oh, Mrs. Mason." And there was a fresh burst of sorrow.

"You don't say so; are you sure? I was not away five minutes."

"Oh, yes, Sir, I'm quite sure. She was so angry, she said *I must never show* my face there again. Oh, *dear! what shall I do?*"

It seemed to the poor child as if Mrs. Mason's words were irrevocable, and that, being so, she was shut out from every house. She saw how much she had done that was deserving of blame, now when it was too late to undo it. She knew with what severity and taunts Mrs. Mason had often treated her for involuntary failings, of which she had been quite unconscious; and now she had really done wrong, and shrank with terror from the consequences. Her eyes were so blinded by the fast-falling tears, she did not see (nor had she seen would she have been able to interpret) the change in Mr. Bellingham's countenance, as he stood silently watching her. He was silent so long, that even in her sorrow she began to wonder that he did not speak, and to wish to hear his soothing words once more.

"It is very unfortunate," he began, at last; and then he stopped; then he began again: "It is very unfortunate; for, you see, I did not like to name it to you before, but, I believe — I have business, in fact which obliges me to go to town to-morrow — t London, I mean; and I don't know when I shall b able to return."

"To London!" cried Ruth; "are you going awa Oh, Mr. Bellingham!" She wept afresh, giving h self up to the desolate feeling of sorrow, which sorbed all the terror she had been experiencing at idea of Mrs. Mason's anger. It seemed to her at moment as though she could have borne everyt but his departure; but she did not speak again; after two or three minutes had elapsed, he spok *not in his natural* careless voice, but in a sort of *strained agitated* tone.

"I can hardly bear the idea of leaving you, my own Ruth. In such distress, too; for where you can go I do not know at all. From all you have told me of Mrs. Mason, I don't think she is likely to mitigate her severity in your case."

No answer, but tears quietly, incessantly flowing. Mrs. Mason's displeasure seemed a distant thing; his going away was the present distress. He went on:

"Ruth, would you go with me to London? My darling, I cannot leave you here without a home; the thought of leaving you at all is pain enough, but in these circumstances — so friendless, so homeless — it is impossible. You must come with me, love, and trust to me."

Still, she did not speak. Remember how young, and innocent, and motherless she was! It seemed to her as if it would be happiness enough to be with him; and as for the future, he would arrange and decide for that. The future lay wrapped in a golden mist, which she did not care to penetrate; but if he, her sun, was out of sight, and gone, the golden mist became dark heavy gloom, through which no hope could come. He took her hand.

"Will you not come with me? Do you not love me enough to trust me? Oh, Ruth (reproachfully), can you not trust me?"

She had stopped crying, but was sobbing sadly.

"I cannot bear this, love. Your sorrow is absolute pain to me; but it is worse to feel how indifferent you are — how little you care about our separation."

He dropped her hand. She burst into a fresh fit of crying.

"*I may have to join* my mother in Paris; I don't

know when I shall see you again. Oh, Ruth!" said he, vehemently, "do you love me at all?"

She said something in a very low voice; he could not hear it, though he bent down his head — but he took her hand again.

"What was it you said, love? Was it not that you did love me? My darling, you do! I can tell it by the trembling of this little hand; then, you will not suffer me to go away alone and unhappy, most anxious about you? There is no other course open to you; my poor girl has no friends to receive her. I will go home directly, and return in an hour with a carriage. You make me too happy by your silence, Ruth."

"Oh, what can I do!" exclaimed Ruth. "Mr Bellingham, you should help me, and instead of that you only bewilder me."

"How, my dearest Ruth? Bewilder you! It seems so clear to me. Look at the case fairly! Here you are, an orphan, with only one person to love you, poor child! — thrown off, for no fault of yours, by the only creature on whom you have a claim, that creature a tyrannical, inflexible woman; what is more natural (and, being natural, more right) than that you should throw yourself upon the care of the one who loves you dearly — who would go through fire and water for you — who would shelter you from all harm? Unless, indeed, as I suspect, you do not care for him. If so, Ruth! if you do not care for me, we had better part — I will leave you at once; it will be better for me to go, if you do not care for me."

He said this very sadly (it seemed so to Ruth, at least), and made as though he would have drawn his hand from hers, but now she held it with soft force.

"Don't leave me, please, Sir. It is very true I have no friend but you. Don't leave me, please. But, oh! do tell me what I must do!"

"Will you do it if I tell you? If you will trust me, I will do my very best for you. I will give you my best advice. You see your position; Mrs. Mason writes and gives her own exaggerated account to your guardian; he is bound by no great love to you, from what I have heard you say, and throws you off; I, who might be able to befriend you — through my mother, perhaps — I, who could at least comfort you a little (could not I, Ruth?) am away, far away, for an indefinite time; that is your position at present. Now, what I advise is this. Come with me into this little inn; I will order tea for you — (I am sure you require it sadly) — and I will leave you there, and go home for the carriage. I will return in an hour at the latest. Then we are together, come what may; that is enough for me, is it not for you, Ruth? Say, yes — say it ever so low, but give me the delight of hearing it. Ruth, say yes."

Low and soft, with much hesitation, came the "Yes;" the fatal word of which she so little imagined the infinite consequences. The thought of being with him was all and everything.

"How you tremble, my darling! You are cold, love! Come into the house, and I'll order tea directly, and be off."

She rose, and, leaning on his arm, went into the house. She was shaking and dizzy with the agitation of the last hour. He spoke to the civil farmer-landlord, who conducted them into a neat parlour, with windows opening into the garden at the back of the

house. They had admitted much of the evening's fragrance through their open casements, before they were hastily closed by the attentive host.

"Tea, directly, for this lady!" The landlord vanished.

"Dearest Ruth, I must go; there is not an instant to be lost; promise me to take some tea, for you are shivering all over, and deadly pale with the fright that abominable woman has given you. I must go; I shall be back in half an hour — and then no more partings, darling."

He kissed her pale cold face, and went away. The room whirled round before Ruth; it was a dream — a strange, varying, shifting dream — with the old home of her childhood for one scene, with the terror of Mrs. Mason's unexpected appearance for another; and then, strangest, dizziest, happiest of all, there was the consciousness of his love, who was all the world to her; and the remembrance of the tender words, which still kept up their low soft echo in her heart.

Her head ached so much that she could hardly see; even the dusky twilight was a dazzling glare to her poor eyes; and when the daughter of the house brought in the sharp light of the candles, preparatory for tea, Ruth hid her face in the sofa pillows with a low exclamation of pain.

"Does your head ache, Miss?" asked the girl, in a gentle, sympathising voice. "Let me make you some tea, Miss, it will do you good. Many 's the time poor mother's headaches were cured by good strong tea."

Ruth murmured acquiescence; the young girl (about Ruth's own age, but who was the mistress of the little establishment, owing to her mother's death) made tea,

and brought Ruth a cup to the sofa where she lay. Ruth was feverish and thirsty, and eagerly drank it off, although she could not touch the bread-and-butter which the girl offered her. She felt better and fresher, though she was still faint and weak.

"Thank you," said Ruth. "Don't let me keep you; perhaps you are busy. You have been very kind, and the tea has done me a great deal of good."

The girl left the room. Ruth became as hot as she had previously been cold, and went and opened the window, and leant out into the still, sweet, evening air. The bush of sweet-briar, underneath the window, scented the place, and the delicious fragrance reminded her of her old home. I think scents affect and quicken the memory more than either sights or sounds; for Ruth had instantly before her eyes the little garden beneath the window of her mother's room, with the old man leaning on his stick, watching her, just as he had done, not three hours before, on that very afternoon.

"Dear old Thomas! He and Mary would take me in, I think; they would love me all the more if I were cast off. And Mr. Bellingham would, perhaps, not be so very long away; and he would know where to find me if I stayed at Milham Grange. Oh, would it not be better to go to them? I wonder if he would be very sorry! I could not bear to make him sorry, so kind as he has been to me; but I do believe it would be better to go to them, and ask their advice, at any rate. He would follow me there; and I could talk over what I had better do, with the three best friends I have in the world — the only friends I have."

She put on her bonnet, and opened the parlour door; but then she saw the square figure of the land-

lord standing at the open house-door, smoking h evening pipe, and looming large and distinct again the dark air and landscape beyond. Ruth remember the cup of tea that she had drank; it must be paid fo and she had no money with her. She feared that l would not let her quit the house without paying. Sh thought that she would leave a note for Mr. Bellin ham, saying where she was gone, and how she h left the house in debt, for (like a child) all dilemm appeared of equal magnitude to her; and the difficul of passing the landlord while he stood there, and giving him an explanation of the circumstances (as f as such explanation was due to him), appeared i superable, and as awkward, and fraught with inco venience, as far more serious situations. She ke peeping out of her room, after she had written h little pencil note, to see if the outer door was st obstructed. There he stood, motionless, enjoying h pipe, and looking out into the darkness which gather thick with the coming night. The fumes of the tobac were carried by the air into the house, and broug back Ruth's sick headache. Her energy left her; s became stupid and languid, and incapable of spirit exertion; she modified her plan of action, to the dete mination of asking Mr. Bellingham to take her to M ham Grange, to the care of her humble friends, inste of to London. And she thought, in her simplicit that he would instantly consent when he had hea her reasons.

She started up. A carriage dashed up to the doc She hushed her beating heart, and tried to stop h throbbing head to listen. She heard him speaking the landlord, though she could not distinguish what h

ard the jingling of money, and, in another
, he was in the room, and had taken her arm
her to the carriage.

, Sir! I want you to take me to Milham
" said she, holding back. "Old Thomas
ive me a home."

ll, dearest, we'll talk of all that in the car-
am sure you will listen to reason. Nay, if
l go to Milham you must go in the carriage,"
hurriedly. She was little accustomed to op-
e wishes of any one — obedient and docile by
and unsuspicious and innocent of any harmful
ences. She entered the carriage, and drove
London.

CHAPTER IV.

THE June of 18— had been glorious and sunn and full of flowers; but July came in with pouri rain, and it was a gloomy time for travellers and f weather-bound tourists, who lounged away the da in touching up sketches, dressing flies, and readi over again for the twentieth time the few volum they had brought with them. A number of the *Tim* five days old, had been in constant demand, in all t sitting-rooms of a certain inn in a little mountain v lage of North Wales, through a long July mornir The valleys around were filled with thick cold mi which had crept up the hill-sides till the hamlet its was folded in its white dense curtain, and from t inn windows nothing was seen of the beautiful scene around. The tourists who thronged the rooms mig as well have been "wi' their dear little bairnies hame;" and so some of them seemed to think, as th stood, with their faces flattened against the windo panes, looking abroad in search of an event to fill the dreary time. How many dinners were hasten that day, by way of getting through the morning, the poor Welsh kitchen-maid say! The very ville children kept in-doors; or if one or two more adv turous stole out into the land of temptation and pu dles, they were soon clutched back by angry and bu mothers.

It was only four o'clock, but most of the inma

inn thought it must be between six and seven, orning had seemed so long — so many hours ıssed since dinner — when a Welsh car, drawn horses, rattled briskly up to the door. Every v of the ark was crowded with faces at the the leathern curtains were undrawn to their eyes, and out sprang a gentleman, who care- ssisted a well-cloaked-up lady into the little inn, the landlady's assurances of not having a room e.

e gentleman (it was Mr. Bellingham) paid no on to the speeches of the hostess, but quietly ıtended the unpacking of the carriage, and paid stilion; then, turning round with his face to the he spoke to the landlady, whose voice had been during the last five minutes:

ay, Jenny, you're strangely altered, if you can ut an old friend on such an evening as this. member right, Pen trê Voelas is twenty miles the bleakest mountain road I ever saw."

ıdeed, Sir, and I did not know you; Mr. Bel- n, I believe. Indeed, Sir, Pen trê Voelas is ove eighteen miles — we only charge for eigh- t may not be much above seventeen; and we're ull, indeed, more's the pity."

Vell, but Jenny, to oblige me, an old friend, ın find lodgings out for some of your people — ouse across, for instance."

ıdeed, Sir, and it's at liberty; perhaps you not mind lodging there yourself; I could get ıe best rooms, and send over a trifle or so of ıre, if they wern't as you'd wish them to be."

ſo, Jenny! here I stay. You'll not induce me

to venture over into those rooms, whose dirt I kno of old. Can't you persuade some one who is not old friend to move across? Say, if you like, that had written beforehand to bespeak the rooms. Oh! know you can manage it — I know your good-natur ways."

"Indeed, Sir — well! I'll see, if you and the la will just step into the back parlour, Sir — there 's one there just now — the lady is keeping her bed t day for a cold, and the gentleman is having a rubb at whist in number three. I'll see what I can do."

"Thank you, thank you. Is there a fire? if n one must be lighted. Come, Ruthie, come."

He led the way into a large, bow-windowed roo which looked gloomy enough that afternoon, but whi I have seen bright and buoyant with youth and ho within, and sunny lights creeping down the purp mountain slope, and stealing over the green, soft me dows, till they reached the little garden, full of ros and lavender bushes, lying close under the windo I have seen — but I shall see no more.

"I did not know you had been here before," sa Ruth, as Mr. Bellingham helped her off with her cloak

"Oh, yes; three years ago I was here on a rea ing party. We were here above two months, attrac ed by Jenny's kind heart and oddities; but driv away finally by the insufferable dirt. However, for week or two it won't much signify."

"But can she take us in, Sir? I thought I hea her saying her house was full."

"Oh, yes — I dare say it is; but I shall pay h *well; she* can easily make excuses to some poor dev *and send him* over to the other side, and, for a d

or two, so that we have shelter, it does not much signify."

"Could not we go to the house on the other side, Sir?"

"And have our meals carried across to us in a half-warm state, to say nothing of having no one to scold for bad cooking! You don't know these out-of-the-way Welsh inns yet, Ruthie."

"No! I only thought it seemed rather unfair —" said Ruth, gently; but she did not end her sentence, for Mr. Bellingham formed his lips into a whistle, and walked to the window to survey the rain.

The remembrance of his former good payment prompted many little lies of which Mrs. Morgan was guilty that afternoon, before she succeeded in turning out a gentleman and lady, who were only planning to remain till the ensuing Saturday at the outside, so, if they did fulfil their threat, and leave on the next day, she would be no very great loser.

These household arrangements complete, she solaced herself with tea in her own little parlour, and shrewdly reviewed the circumstances of Mr. Bellingham's arrival.

"Indeed! and she's not his wife," thought Jenny, "that's clear as day. His wife would have brought her maid, and given herself twice as many airs about the sitting-rooms; while this poor miss never spoke, but kept as still as a mouse. Indeed, and young men will be young men; and, as long as their fathers and mothers shut their eyes, it's none of my business to go about asking questions."

In this manner they settled down to a week's enjoyment of that Alpine country. It was most true

enjoyment to Ruth. It was opening a new sense; v
ideas of beauty and grandeur filled her mind at t
sight of the mountains now first beheld in full m
jesty. She was almost overpowered by the vague a
solemn delight; but by-and-by her love for th
equalled her awe, and in the night-time she wo
softly rise, and steal to the window to see the wh
moonlight, which gave a new aspect to the everla
ing hills that girdle the mountain village.

Their breakfast-hour was late, in accordance w
Mr. Bellingham's tastes and habits; but Ruth was
betimes, and out and away, brushing the dew-dr
from the short crisp grass; the lark sung high ab
her head, and she knew not if she moved or st
still, for the grandeur of this beautiful earth absor
all idea of separate and individual existence. E
rain was a pleasure to her. She sat in the windo
seat of their parlour (she would have gone out glad
but that such a proceeding annoyed Mr. Bellingha
who usually at such times lounged away the listl
hours on a sofa, and relieved himself by abusing
weather); she saw the swift fleeting showers co
athwart the sunlight like a rush of silver arrows; s
watched the purple darkness on the heathery mo
tain side, and then the pale golden gleam which s
ceeded. There was no change or alteration of nat
that had not its own peculiar beauty in the eyes
Ruth; but if she had complained of the changea
climate, she would have pleased Mr. Bellingham mo
her admiration and her content made him angry, u
her pretty motions and loving eyes soothed down
impatience.

"Really, Ruth," he exclaimed one day, when t

had been imprisoned by rain a whole morning, "one would think you had never seen a shower of rain before; 'it quite wearies me to see you sitting there watching this detestable weather with such a placid countenance; and for the last two hours you have said nothing more amusing or interesting than —' Oh, how beautiful!' or, 'There 's another cloud coming across Moel Wynn.' "

Ruth left her seat very gently, and took up her work. She wished she had the gift of being amusing; it must be dull for a man accustomed to all kinds of active employments to be shut up in the house. She was recalled from her absolute self-forgetfulness. What could she say to interest Mr. Bellingham? While she thought, he spoke again:

"I remember when we were reading here three years ago, we had a week of just such weather as this; but Howard and Johnson were capital whist-players, and Wilbraham not bad, so we got through the days famously. Can you play *écarté*, Ruth, or picquet?"

"No, Sir; I have sometimes played at beggar-my-neighbour," answered Ruth, humbly, regretting her own deficiencies.

He murmured impatiently, and there was silence for another half hour. Then he sprang up, and rung the bell violently. "Ask Mrs. Morgan for a pack of cards. Ruthie, I 'll teach you *écarté*," said he.

But Ruth was stupid, not so good as a dummy, he said; and it was no fun betting against himself. So the cards were flung across the table — on the floor — anywhere. Ruth picked them up. As she rose, she sighed a little with the depression of spirits con-

sequent upon her own want of power to amuse a occupy him she loved.

"You 're pale, love!" said he, half repenting his anger at her blunders over the cards. "Go o before dinner; you know you don't mind this curs weather; and see that you come home full of adve tures to relate. Come, little blockhead! give me kiss, and begone."

She left the room with a feeling of relief; for if were dull without her, she should not feel respo sible, and unhappy at her own stupidity. The op air, that kind soothing balm which gentle moth Nature offers to us all in our seasons of depressio relieved her. The rain had ceased, though every le and blade was loaded with trembling glittering drop Ruth went down to the circular dale, into which t brown-foaming mountain river fell and made a de pool, and, after resting there for a while, ran between broken rocks down to the valley below. T waterfall was magnificent, as she had anticipated; s longed to extend her walk to the other side of t stream, so she sought the stepping-stones, the usu crossing-place, which were overshadowed by trees, few yards from the pool. The waters ran high a rapidly, as busy as life, between the pieces of gr rock; but Ruth had no fear, and went lightly a steadily on. About the middle, however, there was great gap; either one of the stones was so cover with water as to be invisible, or it had been wash lower down; at any rate, the spring from stone stone was long, and Ruth hesitated for a mome before taking it. The sound of rushing waters w in her ears to the exclusion of every other noi

her eyes were on the current running swiftly below her feet; and thus she was startled to see a figure close before her on one of the stones, and to hear a voice offering help.

She looked up and saw a man, who was apparently long past middle life, and of the stature of a dwarf; a second glance accounted for the low height of the speaker, for then she saw he was deformed. As the consciousness of this infirmity came into her mind, it must have told itself in her softened eyes, for a faint flush of colour came into the pale face of the deformed gentleman, as he repeated his words:

"The water is very rapid; will you take my hand? Perhaps I can help you."

Ruth accepted the offer, and with this assistance she was across in a moment. He made way for her to precede him in the narrow wood path, and then silently followed her up the glen.

When they had passed out of the wood into the pasture-land beyond, Ruth once more turned to mark him. She was struck afresh with the mild beauty of the face, though there was something in the countenance which told of the body's deformity, something more and beyond the pallor of habitual ill-health, something of a quick spiritual light in the deep-set eyes, a sensibility about the mouth; but altogether, though a peculiar, it was a most attractive face.

"Will you allow me to accompany you if you are going the round by Cwm Dhu, as I imagine you are? The hand-rail is blown away from the little wooden bridge by the storm last night, and the rush of waters below may make you dizzy; and

it is really dangerous to fall there, the stream is deep."

They walked on without much speech. wondered who her companion might be. She sh have known him, if she had seen him among strangers at the inn; and yet he spoke English well to be a Welshman; he knew the country the paths so perfectly, he must be a resident; an she tossed him from England to Wales and back a in her imagination.

"I only came here yesterday," said he, a widening in the path permitted them to walk abre "Last night I went to the higher waterfalls; t are most splendid."

"Did you go out in all that rain?" asked R timidly.

"Oh, yes. Rain never hinders me from walk Indeed, it gives a new beauty to such a countr this. Besides, my time for my excursion is so sh I cannot afford to waste a day."

"Then, you do not live here?" asked Ruth.

"No! my home is in a very different place. I in a busy town, where at times it is difficult to the truth that

> There are in this loud stunning tide
> Of human care and crime,
> With whom the melodies abide
> Of th' everlasting chime.
> Who carry music in their heart
> Through dusky lane and crowded mart,
> Plying their task with busier feet,
> Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat.

I have an annual holiday, which I generally sp in Wales; and often in this immediate neighbo hood."

› not wonder at your choice," replied Ruth. beautiful country."

›, indeed; and I have been inoculated by an ›eper at Conway with a love for its people, ry, and traditions. I have picked up enough nguage to understand many of their legends; › are very fine and awe-inspiring, others very d fanciful."

was too shy to keep up the conversation by ırk of her own, although his gentle, pensive vas very winning.

instance," said he, touching a long bud- em of fox-glove in the hedge-side, at the ›f which one or two crimson speckled flowers sting from their green sheaths, "I dare say, t know what makes this fox-glove bend and gracefully. You think it is blown by the ›n't you?" He looked at her with a grave hich did not enliven his thoughtful eyes, but inexpressible sweetness to his face.

ways thought it was the wind. What is it?" ıth, innocently.

the Welsh tell you that this flower is sacred ıiries, and that it has the power of recogni- n, and all spiritual beings who pass by, and ows in deference to them as they waft along. sh name is Maneg Ellyllyn — the good glove; and hence, I imagine, our folk's-glove love."

a very pretty fancy," said Ruth, much in- and wishing that he would go on, without ᵹ her to reply.

they were already at the wooden bridge,

he led her across, and then, bowing his adieu, he ha taken a different path even before Ruth had thanke him for his attention.

It was an adventure to tell Mr. Bellingham, how ever; and it roused and amused him till dinner-tim came, after which he sauntered forth with a ciga

"Ruth," said he, when he returned, "I've see your little hunchback. He looks like Riquet-with the-Tuft. He's not a gentleman, though. If it ha not been for his deformity, I should not have mad him out from your description; you called him gentleman."

"And don't you, Sir?" asked Ruth, surprised.

"Oh, no! he's regularly shabby and seedy in h appearance; lodging, too, the ostler told me, ov that horrible candle and cheese shop, the smell which is insufferable twenty yards off — no gentle man could endure it; he must be a traveller or artis or something of that kind."

"Did you see his face, Sir?" asked Ruth.

"No; but a man's back — his *tout ensemble* ha character enough in it to decide his rank."

"His face was very singular; quite beautiful! said she, softly; but the subject did not interes Mr. Bellingham, and he let it drop.

CHAPTER VI.

THE next day the weather was brave and glorious; ɔerfect "bridal of the earth and sky;" and every turned out of the inn to enjoy the fresh beauty of ıre. Ruth was quite unconscious of being the ob- of remark, and, in her light rapid passings to and had never looked at the doors and windows, where ıy watchers stood observing her, and commenting n her situation or her appearance.

"She 's a very lovely creature," said one gentle- ı, rising from the breakfast-table to catch a glimpse her, as she entered from her morning's ramble. ɔt above sixteen, I should think. Very modest and ɔcent-looking in her white gown!"

His wife, busy administering to the wants of a fine e boy, could only say (without seeing the young 's modest ways, and gentle, down-cast counte- ce):

"Well! I do think it 's a shame such people should allowed to come here. To think of such wicked- ɜ under the same roof! Do come away, my dear, don't flatter her by such notice."

The husband returned to the breakfast-table; he ılt the broiled ham and eggs, and he heard his ɔ's commands. Whether smelling or hearing had ıt to do in causing his obedience, I cannot tell; haps you *can*.

"*Now, Harry, go* and see if nurse and baby are

ready to go out with you. You must lose no ti this beautiful morning."

Ruth found Mr. Bellingham was not yet come dow so she sallied out for an additional half hour's ramb Flitting about through the village, trying to catch the beautiful sunny peeps at the scenery between t cold stone houses, which threw the radiant distar into aërial perspective far away, she passed by t little shop; and, just issuing from it, came the nu and baby, and little boy. The baby sat in pla dignity in her nurse's arms, with a face of quee calm. Her fresh, soft, peachy complexion was rea tempting; and Ruth, who was always fond of childr went up to coo and to smile at the little thing, a after some "peep-boing," she was about to snatch kiss, when Harry, whose face had been reddening e since the play began, lifted up his sturdy little ri arm and hit Ruth a great blow on the face.

"Oh, for shame, Sir!" said the nurse, snatchi back his hand; "how dare you do that to the la who is so kind as to speak to Sissy."

"She 's not a lady!" said he, indignantly. "Sh a bad naughty girl — mamma said so, she did; a she sha'n't kiss our baby."

The nurse reddened in her turn. She knew w he must have heard; but it was awkward to bring out, standing face to face with the elegant young la

"Children pick up such notions, Ma'am," said at last, apologetically to Ruth, who stood, white a still, with a new idea running through her mind.

"It 's no notion; it 's true, nurse; and I heard y *say it yourself.* Go away, naughty woman!" said *boy, in infantile* vehemence of passion to Ruth.

To the nurse's infinite relief, Ruth turned away, humbly and meekly, with bent head, and slow, uncertain steps. But as she turned, she saw the mild sad face of the deformed gentleman, who was sitting at the open window above the shop; he looked sadder and graver than ever; and his eyes met her glance with an expression of deep sorrow. And so, condemned alike by youth and age, she stole with timid step into the house. Mr. Bellingham was awaiting her coming in the sitting-room. The glorious day restored all his buoyancy of spirits. He talked gaily away, without pausing for a reply; while Ruth made tea, and tried to calm her heart, which was yet beating with the agitation of the new ideas she had received from the occurrence of the morning. Luckily for her, the only answers required for some time were monosyllables; but those few words were uttered in so depressed and mournful a tone, that at last they struck Mr. Bellingham with surprise and displeasure, as the condition of mind they unconsciously implied did not harmonise with his own.

"Ruth, what is the matter this morning? You really are very provoking. Yesterday, when everything was gloomy, and you might have been aware that I was out of spirits, I heard nothing but expressions of delight; to-day, when every creature under heaven is rejoicing, you look most deplorable and woe-begone. You really should learn to have a little sympathy."

The tears fell quickly down Ruth's cheeks, but she did not speak. She could not put into words the sense she was *just beginning* to entertain of the esti*mation in which she* was henceforward to be held.

She thought he would be as much grieved as she
at what had taken place that morning; she fancied
should sink in his opinion if she told him how ot
regarded her; besides, it seemed ungenerous to di
upon the suffering of which he was the cause.

"I will not," thought she, "embitter his life; I
try and be cheerful. I must not think of myself
much. If I can but make him happy, what nee
care for chance speeches?"

Accordingly, she made every effort possible to
as light-hearted as he was; but, somehow, the mom
she relaxed, thoughts would intrude, and wond
would force themselves upon her mind; so that a
gether she was not the gay and bewitching compan
Mr. Bellingham had previously found her.

They sauntered out for a walk. The path t
chose led to a wood on the side of a hill, and t
entered, glad of the shade of the trees. At first
appeared like any common grove, but they soon ca
to a deep descent, on the summit of which they sto
looking down on the tree-tops, which were so
waving far beneath their feet. There was a p
leading sharp down, and they followed it; the ledge
rock made it almost like going down steps, and t
walk grew into a bounding, and their bounding i
a run, before they reached the lowest plane. A gr
gloom reigned there; it was the still hour of noon;
little birds were quiet in some leafy shade. T
went on a few yards, and then they came to a circu
pool overhadowed by the trees, whose high
boughs had been beneath their feet a few minutes
*fore. The pond was hardly below the surface of
ground, and there was nothing like a bank on*

ide. A heron was standing there motionless, but when he saw them he flapped his wings and slowly rose, and soared above the green heights of the wood up into the very sky itself, for at that depth the trees appeared to touch the round white clouds which brooded over the earth. The speed-well grew in the shallowest water of the pool, and all around its margin, but the flowers were hardly seen at first, so deep was the green shadow cast by the trees. In the very middle of the pond the sky was mirrored clear and dark, a blue which looked as if a black void lay behind.

"Oh, there are water-lilies," said Ruth, her eye catching on the farther side. "I must go and get some."

"No; I will get them for you. The ground is spongy all round there. Sit still, Ruth; this heap of grass will make a capital seat."

He went round, and she waited quietly for his return. When he came back he took off her bonnet, without speaking, and began to place his flowers in her hair. She was quite still while he arranged her coronet, looking up in his face with loving eyes, with a peaceful composure. She knew that he was pleased from his manner, which had the joyousness of a child playing with a new toy, and she did not think twice of his occupation. It was pleasant to forget everything except his pleasure. When he had decked her out, he said:

"There, Ruth! now you 'll do. Come and look at yourself in the pond. Here, where there are no weeds. Come."

She obeyed, and could not help seeing her own loveliness; it gave her a sense of satisfaction for an in-

stant, as the sight of any other beautiful object wou have done, but she never thought of associating with herself. She knew that she was beautiful; b that seemed abstract, and removed from herself. H existence was in feeling, and thinking, and loving.

Down in that green hollow they were quite harmony. Her beauty was all that Mr. Bellingh cared for, and it was supreme. It was all he recognis of her, and he was proud of it. She stood in h white dress against the trees which grew around; h face was flushed into a brilliancy of colour which r sembled that of a rose in June; the great heavy wh flowers drooped on either side of her beautiful hea and if her brown hair was a little disordered, the ve disorder only seemed to add a grace. She pleased h more by looking so lovely than by all her tender e deavours to fall in with his varying humour.

But when they left the wood, and Ruth had tak out her flowers, and resumed her bonnet, as they ca near the inn, the simple thought of giving him pleasu was not enough to secure Ruth's peace. She becar pensive and sad, and could not rally into gaiety.

"Really, Ruth," said he, that evening, "you mu not encourage yourself in this habit of falling in melancholy reveries without any cause. You ha been sighing twenty times during the last half hou Do be a little cheerful. Remember, I have no com panion but you in this out-of-the-way place."

"I am very sorry, Sir," said Ruth, her eyes filli with tears; and then she remembered that it w very dull for him to be alone with her, heavy-heart *as she had* been all day. She said in a sweet, penite *tone:*

"Would you be so kind as to teach me one of those games at cards you were speaking about yesterday, Sir? I would do my best to learn."

Her soft, murmuring voice won its way. They rang for the cards, and he soon forgot that there was such a thing as depression or gloom in the world, in the pleasure of teaching such a beautiful ignoramus the mysteries of card-playing.

"There!" said he, at last, "that's enough for one lesson. Do you know, little goose, your blunders have made me laugh myself into one of the worst headaches I have had for years."

He threw himself on the sofa, and in an instant she was by his side.

"Let me put my cool hands on your forehead," she begged; "that used to do mamma good."

He lay still, his face away from the light, and not speaking. Presently he fell asleep. Ruth put out the candles, and sat patiently by him for a long time, fancying he would awaken refreshed. The room grew cool in the night air; but Ruth dared not rouse him from what appeared to be sound, restoring slumber. She covered him with her shawl, which she had thrown over a chair on coming in from their twilight ramble. She had ample time to think; but she tried to banish thought. At last, his breathing became quick and oppressed, and, after listening to it for some minutes with increasing affright, Ruth ventured to waken him. He seemed stupified and shivery. Ruth became more and more terrified; all the household were asleep except one *servant-girl*, who was wearied out of what *little English she had* knowledge of in more waking

hours, and could only answer, "Iss, indeed, Ma'am,' to any question put to her by Ruth.

She sat by the bedside all night long. He moaned and tossed, but never spoke sensibly. It was a new form of illness to the miserable Ruth. Her yesterday's suffering went into the black distance of long-past years. The present was all-in-all. When she heard people stirring, she went in search of Mrs. Morgan, whose shrewd sharp manners, unsoftened by inward respect for the poor girl, had awed Ruth even when Mr. Bellingham was by to protect her.

"Mrs. Morgan," said she, sitting down in the little parlour appropriated to the landlady, for she felt her strength suddenly desert her — "Mrs. Morgan, I'm afraid Mr. Bellingham is very ill;" — here she burst into tears, but instantly checking herself, "Oh, what must I do?" continued she; "I don't think he has known anything all through the night, and he looks so strange and wild this morning."

She gazed up into Mrs. Morgan's face, as if reading an oracle.

"Indeed, Miss, Ma'am, and it's a very awkward thing. But don't cry, that can do no good, 'deed it can't. I'll go and see the poor young man myself, and then I can judge if a doctor is wanting."

Ruth followed Mrs. Morgan up-stairs. When they entered the sick-room Mr. Bellingham was sitting up in bed, looking wildly about him, and as he saw them, he exclaimed:

"Ruth! Ruth! come here; I won't be left alone!" and then he fell down exhausted on the pillow. Mrs. Morgan went up and spoke to him, but he did not *answer or take* any notice.

"I'll send for Mr. Jones, my dear, 'deed and I will; we'll have him here in a couple of hours, please God."

"Oh, can't he come sooner?" asked Ruth, wild with terror.

"'Deed no; he lives at Llanglâs when he's at home, and that's seven mile away, and he may be gone a round eight or nine mile on the other side Llanglâs; but I'll send a boy on the pony directly."

Saying this, Mrs. Morgan left Ruth alone. There was nothing to be done, for Mr. Bellingham had again fallen into heavy sleep. Sounds of daily life began, bells rang, breakfast-services clattered up and down the passages, and Ruth sat on shivering by the bedside in that darkened room. Mrs. Morgan sent her breakfast up-stairs by a chambermaid, but Ruth motioned it away in her sick agony, and the girl had no right to urge her to partake of it. That alone broke the monotony of the long morning. She heard the sound of merry parties setting out on excursions, on horseback or in carriages; and once, stiff and wearied, she stole to the window, and looked out on one side of the blind; but the day looked bright and discordant to her aching, anxious heart. The gloom of the darkened room was better and more befitting.

It was some hours after he was summoned before the doctor made his appearance. He questioned his patient, and, receiving no coherent answers, he asked Ruth concerning the symptoms, but when she questioned him in turn he only shook his head and looked grave. He made a sign to Mrs. Morgan to follow him out of the room, and they went down to her palour, leaving Ruth in a depth of despair, lower than she could have

thought it possible there remained for her to experience, an hour before.

"I am afraid this is a bad case," said Mr. Jones to Mrs. Morgan in Welsh. "A brain-fever has evidently set in."

"Poor young gentleman! poor young man! He looked the very picture of health!"

"That very appearance of robustness will, in all probability, make his disorder more violent. However, we must hope for the best, Mrs. Morgan. Who is to attend upon him? He will require careful nursing. Is that young lady his sister? She looks too young to be his wife?"

"No, indeed! Gentlemen like you must know, Mr. Jones, that we can't always look too closely into the ways of young men who come to our houses. Not but what I 'm sorry for her, for she 's an innocent, inoffensive young creature. I always think it right, for my own morals, to put a little scorn into my manners when such as her come to stay here; but, indeed, she 's so gentle, I 've found it hard work to show the proper contempt."

She would have gone on to her inattentive listener if she had not heard a low tap at the door, which recalled her from her morality, and Mr. Jones from his consideration of the necessary prescriptions.

"Come in!" said Mrs. Morgan, sharply. And Ruth came in. She was white and trembling; but she stood in that dignity which strong feeling, kept down by self-command, always imparts.

"I wish you, Sir, to be so kind as to tell me, clearly and distinctly, what I must do for Mr. Bellingham. Every direction you give me shall be most carefully attended to. You spoke about leeches — I can put

them on, and see about them. Tell me everything, Sir, that you wish to have done!"

Her manner was calm and serious, and her countenance and deportment showed that the occasion was calling out strength sufficient to meet it. Mr. Jones spoke with a deference which he had not thought of using up-stairs, even while he supposed her to be the sister of the invalid. Ruth listened gravely; she repeated some of the injunctions, in order that she might be sure that she fully comprehended them, and then, bowing, left the room.

"She is no common person," said Mr. Jones. "Still she is too young to have the responsibility of such a serious case. Have you any idea where his friends live, Mrs. Morgan?"

"Indeed and I have. His mother, as haughty a lady as you would wish to see, came travelling through Wales last year; she stopped here, and, I warrant you, nothing was good enough for her; she was real quality. She left some clothes and books behind her (for the maid was almost as fine as the mistress, and little thought of seeing after her lady's clothes, having a taste for going to see scenery along with the man-servant), and we had several letters from her. I have them locked in the drawers in the bar, where I keep such things."

"Well! I should recommend your writing to the lady, and telling her her son's state."

"It would be a favour, Mr. Jones, if you would just write it yourself. English writing comes so strange to my pen."

The letter was written, and, in order to save time, Mr. Jones took it to the Llanglas post-office.

CHAPTER VII.

RUTH put away every thought of the past or fu ture; everything that could unfit her for the duties the present. Exceeding love supplied the place experience. She never left the room after the fir day; she forced herself to eat, because his servi needed her strength. She did not indulge in a tears, because the weeping she longed for would ma her less able to attend upon him. She watched, a waited, and prayed: prayed with an utter forgetfulne of self, only with a consciousness that God was powerful, and that he, whom she loved so muc needed the aid of the Mighty One.

Day and night, the summer night, seemed merg into one. She lost count of time in the hushed a darkened room. One morning Mrs. Morgan beckon her out; and she stole on tiptoe into the dazzling g lery, on one side of which the bedrooms opened.

"She 's come," whispered Mrs. Morgan, looki very much excited, and forgetting that Ruth had nev heard that Mrs. Bellingham had been summoned.

"Who is come?" asked Ruth. The idea of M Mason flashed through her mind — but with a mc terrible, because a more vague dread, she heard that was his mother; the mother of whom he had alwa spoken as a person whose opinion was to be regard *more* than that of any other individual.

"*What* must I do? Will she be angry with me

said she, relapsing into her child-like dependence on others; and feeling that even Mrs. Morgan was some one to stand between her and Mrs. Bellingham.

Mrs. Morgan herself was a little perplexed. Her morality was rather shocked at the idea of a proper real lady like Mrs. Bellingham discovering that she had winked at the connexion between her son and Ruth. She was quite inclined to encourage Ruth in her inclination to shrink out of Mrs. Bellingham's observation, an inclination which arose from no definite consciousness of having done wrong, but principally from the representations she had always heard of the lady's awfulness. Mrs. Bellingham swept into her son's room as if she were unconscious what poor young creature had lately haunted it; while Ruth hurried into some unoccupied bedroom, and, alone there, she felt her self-restraint suddenly give way, and burst into the saddest, most utterly wretched weeping she had ever known. She was worn out with watching, and exhausted by passionate crying, and she lay down on the bed and fell asleep. The day passed on; she slumbered unnoticed and unregarded; she awoke late in the evening with a sense of having done wrong in sleeping so long; the strain upon her responsibility had not yet left her. Twilight was closing fast around; she waited until it had become night, and then she stole down to Mrs. Morgan's parlour.

"If you please may I come in?" asked she.

Jenny Morgan was doing up the hieroglyphics which she called her accounts; she answered sharply enough, but *it was a* permission to enter, and Ruth *was thankful for it.*

"Will you tell me how he is? Do you think I may go back to him?"

"No, indeed, that you may not. Nest, who has made his room tidy these many days, is not fit to go in now. Mrs. Bellingham has brought her own maid, and the family nurse, and Mr. Bellingham's man; such a tribe of servants, and no end to packages; water-beds coming by the carrier, and a doctor from London coming down to-morrow, as if feather beds and Mr. Jones was not good enough. Why, she won't let a soul of us into the room; there's no chance for you!"

Ruth sighed. "How is he?" she inquired, after a pause.

"How can I tell indeed, when I'm not allowed to go near him. Mr. Jones said to-night was a turning point; but I doubt it, for it is four days since he was taken ill, and who ever heard of a sick person taking a turn on an even number of days; it's always on the third, or the fifth, or seventh, or so on. He'll not turn till to-morrow night, take my word for it, and their fine London doctor will get all the credit, and honest Mr. Jones will be thrown aside. I don't think he will get better myself, though — Gelert does not howl for nothing. My patience! what's the matter with the girl — lord, child, you're never going to faint, and be ill on my hands." Her sharp voice recalled Ruth from the sick unconsciousness that had been creeping over her as she listened to the latter part of this speech. She sat down and could not speak — the room whirled round and round — her white feebleness touched Mrs. Morgan's heart.

"You've had no tea, I guess. Indeed, and the *girls are very* careless." She rang the bell with

energy, and seconded her pull by going to the door and shouting out sharp directions, in Welsh, to Nest and Gwen, and three or four other rough, kind, slatternly servants.

They brought her tea, which was comfortable, according to the idea of comfort prevalent in that rude, hospitable place; there was plenty to eat, too much, indeed, for it revolted the appetite it was intended to provoke. But the heartiness with which the kind, rosy waiter pressed her to eat, and the scolding Mrs. Morgan gave her, when she found the buttered toast untouched (toast on which she had herself desired that the butter might not be spared), did Ruth more good than the tea. She began to hope, and to long for the morning when hope might have become certainty. It was all in vain that she was told that the room she had been in all day was at her service; she did not say a word, but she was not going to bed that night, of all nights in the year, when life or death hung trembling in the balance. She went into the sick room till the bustling house was still, and heard busy feet passing to and fro into the room she might not enter; and voices, imperious, though hushed down to a whisper, ask for innumerable things. Then there was silence; and when she thought that all were dead asleep, except the watchers, she stole out into the gallery. On the other side were two windows, cut into the thick stone wall, and flower-pots were placed on the shelves thus formed, where great, untrimmed, straggling geraniums grew, and strove to reach the light. The window near Mr. Bellingham's door was open; the soft, warm-scented *night-air came sighing* in in faint gusts, and then was *still. It was summer*; there was no black darkness in

the twenty-four hours; only the light grew dusky, colour disappeared from objects, of which the sl and form remained distinct. A soft grey oblon barred light fell on the flat wall opposite to the dows, and deeper grey shadows marked out the tra of the plants, more graceful thus than in reality. I crouched where no light fell. She sat on the gr close by the door; her whole existence was abso in listening; all was still; it was only her heart bea with the strong, heavy, regular sound of a ham She wished she could stop its rushing, incessant cl She heard a rustle of a silken gown, and kne ought not to have been worn in a sick room; for senses seemed to have passed into the keeping of invalid, and to feel only as he felt. The noise probably occasioned by some change of posture in watcher inside, for it was once more dead-still. soft wind outside sank with a low, long, distant n among the windings of the hills, and lost itself th and came no more again. But Ruth's heart beat l She rose with as little noise as if she were a vi and crept to the open window to try and lose nervous listening for the ever-recurring sound. beyond, under the calm sky, veiled with a mist ra than with a cloud, rose the high, dark outlines of mountains, shutting in that village as if it lay nest. They stood, like giants, solemnly watching the end of Earth and Time. Here and there a b round shadow reminded Ruth of some "Cwm," hollow, where she and her lover had rambled in and in gladness. She then thought the land encha *into everlasting* brightness and happiness; she fan *then, that into* a region so lovely no bale or woe

enter, but would be charmed away and disappear before the sight of the glorious guardian mountains. Now she knew the truth, that earth has no barrier which avails against agony. It comes lightning-like down from heaven, into the mountain house and the town garret; into the palace and into the cottage. The garden lay close under the house; a bright spot enough by day; for in that soil, whatever was planted grew and blossomed in spite of neglect. The white roses glimmered out in the dusk all the night through; the red were lost in shadow. Between the low boundary of the garden and the hills swept one or two green meadows; Ruth looked into the grey darkness till she traced each separate wave of out-line. Then she heard a little restless bird chirp out its wakefulness from a nest in the ivy round the walls of the house. But the mother-bird spread her soft feathers, and hushed it into silence. Presently, however, many little birds began to scent the coming dawn, and rustled among the leaves, and chirruped loud and clear. Just above the horizon, too, the mist became a silvery grey cloud hanging on the edge of the world; presently it turned shimmering white; and then, in an instant, it flushed into rose, and the mountain tops sprang into heaven, and bathed in the presence of the shadow of God. With a bound, the sun of a molten fiery red came above the horizon, and immediately thousands of little birds sang out for joy, and a soft chorus of mysterious, glad murmurs came forth from the earth; the low whispering wind left its hiding-place among the clefts and hollows of the hills, and wandered among the rustling herbs *and trees, waking* the flower-buds to the life of *another day. Ruth gave* a sigh of relief that the night

was over and gone; for she knew that soon suspense would be ended, and the verdict known, whether for life or for death. She grew faint and sick with anxiety; it almost seemed as if she must go into the room and learn the truth. Then she heard movements, but they were not sharp or rapid, as if prompted by any emergency; then, again, it was still. She sat curled up upon the floor, with her head thrown back against the wall, and her hands clasped round her knees. She had yet to wait. Meanwhile, the invalid was slowly rousing himself from a long, deep, sound, health-giving sleep. His mother had sat by him the night through, and was now daring to change her position for the first time; she was even venturing to give directions in a low voice to the old nurse, who had dozed away in an arm-chair, ready to obey any summons of her mistress. Mrs. Bellingham went on tiptoe towards the door, and chiding herself because her stiff, weary limbs made some slight noise. She had an irrepressible longing for a few minutes' change of scene after her night of watching. She felt that the crisis was over; and the relief to her mind made her conscious of every bodily feeling and irritation, which had passed unheeded as long as she had been in suspense.

She slowly opened the door. Ruth sprang upright at the first sound of the creaking handle. Her very lips were stiff and unpliable with the force of the blood which rushed to her head. It seemed as if she could not form words. She stood right before Mrs. Bellingham. "How is he, Madam?"

Mrs. Bellingham was for a moment surprised at the *white apparition* which seemed to rise out of the *ground.* But her quick, proud mind understood it a

in an instant. This was the girl, then, whose profligacy had led her son astray; had raised up barriers in the way of her favourite scheme of his marriage with Miss Duncombe; nay, this was the real cause of his illness, his mortal danger at this present time, and of her bitter, keen anxiety. If, under any circumstances, Mrs. Bellingham could have been guilty of the ill-breeding of not answering a question, it was now; and for a moment she was tempted to pass on in silence. Ruth could not wait; she spoke again:

"For the love of God, Madam, speak! How is he? Will he live?"

If she did not answer her, she thought the creature was desperate enough to force her way into his room. So she spoke.

"He has slept well: he is better."

"Oh! my God, I thank thee," murmured Ruth, sinking back against the wall.

It was too much to hear this wretched girl thanking God for her son's life; as if, in fact, she had any lot or part in him, and to dare to speak to the Almighty on her son's behalf! Mrs. Bellingham looked at her with cold, contemptuous eyes, whose glances were like ice-bolts, and made Ruth shiver up away from them.

"Young woman, if you have any propriety or decency left, I trust that you will not dare to force yourself into his room."

She stood for a moment as if awaiting an answer, and half expecting it to be a defiance. But she did not understand Ruth. She did not imagine the faithful *trustfulness of her* heart. Ruth believed that if *Mr. Bellingham was* alive and likely to live, all was

well. When he wanted her, he would send for her, ask for her, yearn for her, till every one would yield before his steadfast will. At present she imagined that he was probably too weak to care or know who was about him; and though it would have been an infinite delight to her to hover and brood around him, yet it was of him she thought and not of herself. She gently drew herself on one side to make way for Mrs. Bellingham to pass.

By-and-by Mrs. Morgan came up. Ruth was still near the door, from which it seemed as if she could not tear herself away.

"Indeed, Miss, and you must not hang about the door in this way; it is not pretty manners. Mrs. Bellingham has been speaking very sharp and cross about it, and I shall lose the character of my inn if people take to talking as she does. Did not I give you a room last night to keep in, and never be seen or heard of; and did I not tell you what a particular lady Mrs. Bellingham was, but you must come out here right in her way? Indeed, it was not pretty, nor grateful to me, Jenny Morgan, and that I must say."

Ruth turned away like a chidden child. Mrs. Morgan followed her to her room, scolding as she went; and then, having cleared her heart after her wont by uttering hasty words, her real kindness made her add, in a softened tone:

"You stop up here like a good girl. I'll send you your breakfast by-and-by, and let you know from time to time how he is; and you can go out for a walk, you know; but if you do, I'll take it as a favour if *you 'll go out* by the side door. It will, maybe, save *scandal.*"

All that day long, Ruth kept herself close prisoner in the room to which Mrs. Morgan accorded her; all that day, and many succeeding days. But at nights, when the house was still, and even the little brown mice had gathered up the crumbs, and darted again to their holes, Ruth stole out, and crept to his door to catch, if she could, the sound of his beloved voice. She could tell by its tones how he felt, and how he was getting on, as well as any of the watchers in the room. She yearned and pined to see him once more; but she had reasoned herself down into something like patience. When he was well enough to leave his room, when he had not always one of the nurses with him, then he would send for her, and she would tell him how very patient she had been for his dear sake. But it was long to wait even with this thought of the manner in which the waiting would end. Poor Ruth! her faith was only building up vain castles in the air; they towered up into heaven, it is true, but, after all, they were but visions.

CHAPTER VIII.

If Mr. Bellingham did not get rapidly well, it more owing to the morbid querulous fancy attend on great weakness than from any unfavourable med symptom. But he turned away with peevish loath from the very sight of food, prepared in the slov manner which had almost disgusted him when he well. It was of no use telling him that Simpson, mother's maid, had superintended the preparation every point. He offended her by detecting someth offensive and to be avoided in her daintiest mes and made Mrs. Morgan mutter many a hasty spe which, however, Mrs. Bellingham thought it be not to hear until her son should be strong eno to travel.

"I think you are better to-day," said she, as man wheeled his sofa to the bedroom-window. shall get you down-stairs to-morrow."

"If it were to get away from this abomin place, I could go down to-day; but I believe I 'n be kept prisoner here for ever. I shall never get here, I 'm sure."

He sank back on his sofa in impatient des The surgeon was announced, and eagerly questic by Mrs. Bellingham as to the possibility of her s removal; and he, having heard the same anxiety *the same end* expressed by Mrs. Morgan in the reg *below, threw* no great obstacles in the way.

the doctor had taken his departure, Mrs. Bellingham cleared her throat several times. Mr. Bellingham knew the prelude of old, and winced with nervous annoyance.

"Henry, there is something I must speak to you about; an unpleasant subject, certainly, but one which has been forced upon me by the very girl herself; you must be aware to what I refer without giving me the pain of explaining myself."

Mr. Bellingham turned himself sharply round to the wall, and prepared himself for a lecture by concealing his face from her notice; but she herself was in too nervous a state to be capable of observation.

"Of course," she continued, "it was my wish to be as blind to the whole affair as possible, though you can't imagine how Mrs. Mason has blazoned it abroad; all Fordham rings with it; but of course it could not be pleasant, or, indeed, I may say correct, for me to be aware that a person of such improper character was under the same — I beg your pardon, dear Henry, what do you say?"

"Ruth is no improper character, mother; you do her injustice!"

"My dear boy, you don't mean to uphold her as a paragon of virtue!"

"No, mother, but I led her wrong; I—"

"We will let all discussions into the cause or duration of her present character drop, if you please," said Mrs. Bellingham, with the sort of dignified authority which retained a certain power over her son — a power which originated in childhood, and which he only defied when he *was roused* into passion. He was too *weak in body to oppose* himself to her, and fight the

ground inch by inch. "As I have implied, I do wish to ascertain your share of blame; from wh saw of her one morning, I am convinced of her ward, intrusive manners, utterly without shame, even common modesty."

"What are you referring to?" asked Mr.] lingham, sharply.

"Why, when you were at the worst, and I been watching you all night, and had just gone ou the morning for a breath of fresh air, this girl pus herself before me, and insisted upon speaking to I really had to send Mrs. Morgan to her befor could return to your room. A more impudent, harc ed manner, I never saw."

"Ruth was neither impudent nor hardened; was ignorant enough, and might offend from know no better."

He was getting weary of the discussion, and w ed it had never been begun. From the time he become conscious of his mother's presence, he had the dilemma he was in in regard to Ruth, and vari plans had directly crossed his brain; but it had t so troublesome to weigh and consider them all p perly, that they had been put aside to be settled w he grew stronger. But this difficulty in which was placed by his connexion with Ruth, associ the idea of her in his mind with annoyance and an regret at the whole affair. He wished, in the lang way in which he wished and felt everything not mediately relating to his daily comfort, that he never seen her. It was a most awkward, a most fortunate affair. Notwithstanding this annoyance c *nected with* and arising out of Ruth, he would

submit to hear her abused; and something in his manner impressed this on his mother, for she immediately changed her mode of attack.

"We may as well drop all dispute as to the young woman's manners; but I suppose you do not mean to defend your connexion with her; I suppose you are not so lost to all sense of propriety as to imagine it fit or desirable that your mother and this degraded girl should remain under the same roof, liable to meet at any hour of the day?" She waited for an answer, but no answer came.

"I ask you a simple question; is it, or is it not desirable?"

"I suppose it is not," he replied, gloomily.

"And *I* suppose, from your manner, that you think the difficulty would be best solved by my taking my departure, and leaving you with your vicious companion?"

Again no answer, but inward and increasing annoyance, of which Mr. Bellingham considered Ruth the cause. At length he spoke.

"Mother, you are not helping me in my difficulty. I have no desire to banish you, nor to hurt you, after all your care for me. Ruth has not been so much to blame as you imagine, that I must say; but I do not wish to see her again, if you can tell me how to arrange it otherwise, without behaving unhandsomely. Only spare me all this worry while I am so weak. I put myself in your hands. Dismiss her, as you wish it; but let it be done handsomely, and let me hear no more about it; I cannot bear it; let me have a quiet life, without being lectured while I am pent up here, and unable to shake off unpleasant thoughts."

"My dear Henry, rely upon me."

"No more, mother; it's a bad business, and I can hardly avoid blaming myself in the matter; I don't want to dwell upon it."

"Don't be too severe in your self-reproaches while you are so feeble, dear Henry; it is right to repent but I have no doubt in my own mind she led you wrong with her artifices. But, as you say, everything should be done handsomely. I confess I was deeply grieved when I first heard of the affair, but since I have seen the girl — Well! I'll say no more about her, since I see it displeases you; but I am thankful to God that you see the error of your ways."

She sat silent, thinking for a little while, and then sent for her writing-case, and began to write. Her son became restless, and nervously irritated.

"Mother," he said, "this affair worries me to death. I cannot shake off the thoughts of it."

"Leave it to me, I'll arrange it satisfactorily."

"Could we not leave to-night? I should not be so haunted by this annoyance in another place. I dread seeing her again, because I fear a scene; and yet believe I ought to see her, in order to explain."

"You must not think of such a thing, Henry," said she, alarmed at the very idea. "Sooner than that, we will leave in half an hour, and try to get to Pen trê Vodas to-night. It is not yet three, and the evenings are very long. Simpson should stay and finish the packing; she could go straight to London and meet us there. Macdonald and nurse could go with us. Could you bear twenty miles, do you think?"

Anything to get rid of his uneasiness. He felt

that he was not behaving as he should do, to Ruth, though the really right never entered his head. But it would extricate him from his present dilemma, and save him many lectures; he knew that his mother, always liberal where money was concerned, would "do the thing handsomely," and it would always be easy to write and give Ruth what explanation he felt inclined, in a day or two; so he consented, and soon lost some of his uneasiness in watching the bustle of the preparation for their departure.

All this time Ruth was quietly spending in her room, beguiling the waiting, weary hours, with pictures of the meeting at the end. Her room looked to the back, and was in a side-wing away from the principal state apartments, consequently she was not roused to suspicion by any of the commotion; but, indeed, if she had heard the banging of doors, the sharp directions, the carriage wheels, she would still not have suspected the truth; her own love was too faithful.

It was four o' clock and past, when some one knocked at her door, and, on entering, gave her a note, which Mrs. Bellingham had left. That lady had found some difficulty in wording it, so as to satisfy herself, but it was as follows:

"My son, on recovering from his illness, is, I thank God, happily conscious of the sinful way in which he has been living with you. By his earnest desire, and in order to avoid seeing you again, we are on the point of leaving this place; but, before I go, I wish to exhort you to repentance, and to remind you that you will not have your own guilt alone upon your head, but that of any young man whom you may

succeed in entrapping into vice. I shall pray that you may turn to an honest life, and I strongly recommend you, if indeed you are not 'dead in trespasses and sins,' to enter some penitentiary. In accordance with my son's wishes, I forward you in this envelope a bank-note of fifty pounds.

"MARGARET BELLINGHAM."

Was this the end of all? Had he, indeed, gone? She started up, and asked this last question of the servant, who, half guessing at the purport of the note, had lingered about the room, curious to see the effect produced.

"Iss, indeed, Miss; the carriage drove from the door as I came up-stairs. You 'll see it now on the Yspytty road, if you 'll please to come to the window of No. 24."

Ruth started up, and followed the chambermaid. Ay, there it was, slowly winding up the steep white road, on which it seemed to move at a snail's pace.

She might overtake him — she might — she might speak one farewell word to him, print his face on her heart with a last look — nay, when he saw her he might retract, and not utterly, for ever, leave her. Thus she thought; and she flew back to her room, and snatching up her bonnet, ran, tying the strings with her trembling hands as she went down the stairs, out at the nearest door, little heeding the angry words of Mrs. Morgan; for the hostess, more irritated at Mrs. Bellingham's severe upbraiding at parting, than mollified by her ample payment, was offended by the circumstance of Ruth, in her wild haste, passing *through the* prohibited front door.

But Ruth was away before Mrs. Morgan had finished her speech, out and away, scudding along the road, thought-lost in the breathless rapidity of her motion. Though her heart and head beat almost to bursting, what did it signify if she could but overtake the carriage. It was a nightmare, constantly evading the most passionate wishes and endeavours, and constantly gaining ground. Every time it was visible it was in fact more distant, but Ruth would not believe it. If she could but gain the summit of that weary, everlasting hill, she believed that she could run again, and would soon be nigh upon the carriage. As she ran, she prayed with wild eagerness; she prayed that she might see his face once more, even if she died on the spot before him. It was one of those prayers which God is too merciful to grant; but despairing and wild. As it was, Ruth put her soul into it, and prayed it again, and yet again.

Wave above wave of the ever-rising hills were gained, were crossed, and at last Ruth struggled up to the very top and stood on the bare table of moor, brown and purple, stretching far away till it was lost in the haze of the summer afternoon; the white road was all flat before her, but the carriage she sought and the figure she sought had disappeared. There was no human being there; a few wild, black-faced mountain sheep quietly grazing near the road, as if it were long since they had been disturbed by the passing of any vehicle, was all the life she saw on the bleak moorland.

She threw herself down on the ling by the side of the road, *in despair.* Her only hope was to die, and *she believed she was* dying. She could not think; she

could believe anything. Surely life was a ho
dream, and God would mercifully awaken her fro
She had no penitence, no consciousness of err
offence; no knowledge of any one circumstanc
that he was gone. Yet afterwards, long afterw
she remembered the exact motion of a bright
beetle busily meandering among the wild thyme
her, and she recalled the musical, balanced, wav
drop of a skylark into her nest near the heathe
where she lay. The sun was sinking low, the h
had ceased to quiver near the hotter earth, whe
bethought her once more of the note which she
impatiently thrown down before half mastering its
tents. "Oh, perhaps," she thought, "I have bee
hasty. There may be some words of explanation
him on the other side of the page, to which, i
blind anguish, I never turned. I will go and fin

She lifted herself heavily and stiffly from the cr
heather. She stood dizzy and confused with her cl
of posture; and was so unable to move at first,
her walk was but slow and tottering; but, by-an
she was tasked and goaded by thoughts which f
her into rapid motion, as if, by it, she could e
from her agony. She came down on the level gr
just as many gay or peaceful groups were saunt
leisurely home with hearts at ease; with low l
and quiet smiles, and many an exclamation a
beauty of the summer evening.

Ever since her adventure with the little boy
his sister, Ruth had habitually avoided encount
these happy — innocents, may I call them? —
happy fellow-mortals! And even now, the habit gr
ed on sorrowful humiliation had power over he

paused, and then, on looking back, she saw more people who had come into the main road from a side path. She opened a gate into a pasture-field, and crept up to the hedge-bank until all should have passed by, and she could steal into the inn unseen. She sat down on the sloping turf by the roots of an old hawthorn-tree which grew in the hedge; she was still tearless with hot burning eyes; she heard the merry walkers pass by; she heard the footsteps of the village children, as they ran along to their evening play; she saw the small black cows come into the fields after being milked; and life seemed yet abroad. When would the world be still and dark, and fit for such a deserted, desolate creature as she was? Even in her hiding-place she was not long at peace. The little children, with their curious eyes peering here and there, had peeped through the hedge, and through the gate, and now they gathered from all the four corners of the hamlet, and crowded round the gate; and one more adventurous than the rest, had run into the field to cry, "Gi' me a halfpenny," which set the example to every little one, emulous of his boldness; and there, where she sat, low on the ground, and longing for the sure hiding-place earth gives to the weary, the children kept running in, and pushing one another forwards, and laughing. Poor things; their time had not come for understanding what sorrow is. Ruth would have begged them to leave her alone, and not madden her utterly; but they knew no English save the one eternal "Gi' me a halfpenny." She felt in her heart that there was no pity anywhere. Suddenly, while she thus doubted God, a shadow fell across her garments, on which her miserable eyes were bent. She

looked up. The deformed gentleman she had twice before seen, stood there. He had been attracted by the noisy little crowd, and had questioned them in Welsh, but not understanding enough of the language to comprehend their answers, he had obeyed their signs, and entered the gate to which they pointed. There he saw the young girl whom he had noticed at first for her innocent beauty, and the second time for the idea he had gained respecting her situation; there he saw her, crouched up like some hunted creature, with a wild, scared look of despair, which almost made her lovely face seem fierce; he saw her dress soiled and dim, her bonnet crushed and battered with her tossings to and fro on the moorland bed; he saw the poor, lost wanderer, and when he saw her, he had compassion on her.

There was some look of heavenly pity in his eyes, as gravely and sadly they met her upturned gaze, which touched her stony heart. Still looking at him, as if drawing some good influence from him, she said low and mournfully, "He has left me, Sir! — Sir, he has indeed — he has gone and left me!"

Before he could speak a word to comfort her, she had burst into the wildest, dreariest crying ever mortal cried. The settled form of the event, when put into words, went sharp to her heart; her moans and sobs wrung his soul; but as no speech of his could be heard, if he had been able to decide what best to say, he stood by her in apparent calmness, while she, wretched, wailed and uttered her woe. But when she lay worn out, and stupified into silence, she heard him say, *to himself*, in a low voice:

"*Oh, my* God! for Christ's sake, pity her!"

Ruth lifted up her eyes, and looked at him with a dim perception of the meaning of his words. She regarded him fixedly in a dreamy way, as if they struck some chord in her heart, and she were listening to its echo; and so it was. His pitiful look, or his words, reminded her of the childish days when she knelt at her mother's knee, and she was only conscious of a straining, longing desire to recal it all.

He let her take her time, partly because he was powerfully affected himself by all the circumstrances, and by the sad pale face upturned to his; and partly by an instinctive consciousness that the softest patience was required. But suddenly she startled him, as she herself was startled into a keen sense of the suffering agony of the present; she sprang up and pushed him aside, and went rapidly towards the gate of the field. He could not move as quickly as most men, but he put forth his utmost speed. He followed across the road, on to the rocky common; but as he went along, with his uncertain gait, in the dusk gloaming, he stumbled, and fell over some sharp projecting stone. The acute pain which shot up his back forced a short cry from him; and, when bird and beast are hushed into rest and the stillness of night is over all, a high-pitched sound, like the voice of pain, is carried far in the quiet air. Ruth, speeding on in her despair, heard the sharp utterance, and stopped suddenly short. It did what no remonstrance could have done; it called her out of herself. The tender nature was in her still, in that hour when all good angels seemed to have abandoned her. In the old days she could never bear to hear *or see bodily* suffering in any of God's meanest *creatures, without trying* to succour them; and now,

in her rush to the awful death of the suicide, she stayed her wild steps, and turned to find from whom that sharp sound of anguish had issued.

He lay among the white stones, too faint with pain to move, but with an agony in his mind far keener than any bodily pain, as he thought that by his unfortunate fall he had lost all chance of saving her. He was almost overpowered by his intense thankfulness when he saw her white figure pause, and stand listening, and turn again with slow footsteps, as if searching for some lost thing. He could hardly speak, but he made a sound which, though his heart was inexpressibly glad, was like a groan. She came quickly towards him.

"I am hurt," said he; "do not leave me;" his disabled and tender frame was overcome by the accident and the previous emotions, and he fainted away. Ruth flew to the little mountain stream, the dashing sound of whose waters had been tempting her, but a moment before, to seek forgetfulness in the deep pool into which they fell. She made a basin of her joined hands, and carried enough of the cold fresh water back to dash into his face and restore him to consciousness. While he still kept silence, uncertain what to say best fitted to induce her to listen to him, she said softly:

"Are you better, Sir? — are you very much hurt?"

"Not very much; I am better. Any quick movement is apt to cause me a sudden loss of power in my back, and I believe I stumbled over some of these *projecting* stones. It will soon go off, and you will *help me to* go home, I am sure."

"Oh, yes! Can you go now? I am afraid of your lying too long on this heather; there is a heavy dew."

He was so anxious to comply with her wish, and not weary out her thought for him, and so turn her back upon herself, that he tried to rise. The pain was acute, and this she saw.

"Don't hurry yourself, Sir; I can wait."

Then came across her mind the recollection of the business that was thus deferred, but the few homely words which had been exchanged between them seemed to have awakened her from her madness. She sat down by him, and, covering her face with her hands, cried mournfully and unceasingly. She forgot his presence, and yet she had a consciousness that some one looked for her kind offices, that she was wanted in the world, and must not rush hastily out of it. The consciousness did not take this definite form, it did not become a thought, but it kept her still, and it was gradually soothing her.

"Can you help me to rise now?" said he, after a while. She did not speak, but she helped him up, and then he took her arm, and she led him tenderly through all the little velvet paths, where the turf grew short and soft between the rugged stones. Once more on the highway, they slowly passed along in the moonlight. He guided her by a slight motion of the arm, through the more unfrequented lanes, to his lodgings at the shop; for he thought for her, and conceived the pain she would have in seeing the lighted windows of the inn. He leant more heavily on her arm, as they awaited the opening of the door.

"Come in," said he, not relaxing his hold, and yet

dreading to tighten it, lest she should defy restraint, and once more rush away.

They went slowly into the little parlour behind the shop. The bonny-looking hostess, Mrs. Hughes by name, made haste to light the candle, and then they saw each other, face to face. The deformed gentleman looked very pale, but Ruth looked as if the shadow of death was upon her.

CHAPTER IX.

Hughes bustled about with many a sym-
exclamation, now in pretty broken English,
ıore fluent Welsh, which sounded as soft as
or Italian, in her musical voice. Mr. Benson,
was the name of the hunchback, lay on the
nking; while the tender Mrs. Hughes made
rangement for his relief from pain. He had
vith her for three successive years, and she
l loved him.

stood in the little bow-window, looking out.
he moon, and over the deep blue heavens,
:n, irregular-shaped clouds went hurrying, as
)ned by some storm-spirit. The work they
mmanded to do was not here; the mighty
;-place lay eastward, immeasurable leagues,
hey went, chasing each other over the silent
)w black, now silver-white at one transparent
ow with the moon shining like Hope through
'kest centre, now again with a silver lining;
, utterly black, they sailed lower in the lift,
)peared behind the immovable mountains; they
hing in the very direction in which Ruth had
ınd struggled to go that afternoon; they, in
d career, would soon pass over the very spot
: (her world's he) was lying sleeping, or per-
sleeping, perhaps thinking of her. The storm
r mind, and rent and tore her purposes into

forms as wild and irregular as the heavenly shapes she was looking at. If, like them, she could pass the barrier horizon in the night, she might overtake him.

Mr. Benson saw her look, and read it partially. He saw her longing gaze outwards upon the free, broad world, and thought that the syren waters, whose deadly music yet rang in his ears, were again tempting her. He called her to him, praying that his feeble voice might have power.

"My dear young lady, I have much to say to you; and God has taken my strength from me now when I most need it. — Oh, I sin to speak so — but, for His sake, I implore you to be patient here, if only till to-morrow morning." He looked at her, but her face was immovable, and she did not speak. She could not give up her hope, her chance, her liberty till to-morrow.

"God help me," said he, mournfully, "my words do not touch her;" and, still holding her hand, he sank back on the pillows. Indeed, it was true that his words did not vibrate in her atmosphere. The storm-spirit raged there, and filled her heart with the thought that she was an outcast; and the holy words "for His sake," were answered by the demon, who held possession, with a blasphemous defiance of the merciful God:

"What have I to do with Thee?"

He thought of every softening influence of religion which over his own disciplined heart had power, but put them aside as useless. Then the still small voice *whispered*, and he spake:

"*In your* mother's name, whether she be dead or

alive, I command you to stay here until I am able to speak to you."

She knelt down at the foot of the sofa, and shook it with her sobs. Her heart was touched, and he hardly dared to speak again. At length he said:

"I know you will not go — you could not — for her sake. You will not, will you?"

"No," whispered Ruth; and then there was a great blank in her heart. She had given up her chance. She was calm, in the utter absence of all hope.

"And now you will do what I tell you," said he, gently, but, unconsciously to himself, in the tone of one who has found the hidden spell by which to rule spirits.

She slowly said, "Yes." But she was subdued.

He called Mrs. Hughes. She came from her adjoining shop.

"You have a bedroom within yours, where your daughter used to sleep, I think? I am sure you will oblige me, and I shall consider it as a great favour, if you will allow this young lady to sleep there to-night. Will you take her there now? Go, my dear. I have full trust in your promise not to leave until I can speak to you." His voice died away to silence; but as Ruth rose from her knees at his bidding, she looked at his face through her tears. His lips were moving in earnest, unspoken prayer, and she knew it was for her.

That night, although his pain was relieved by rest, he could not sleep; and, as in fever, the coming events kept unrolling themselves before him in every changing and fantastic form. He met Ruth in all possible places and *ways, and addressed* her in every manner he could

imagine most calculated to move and affect her to penitence and virtue. Towards morning he fell asleep, but the same thoughts haunted his dreams; he spoke, but his voice refused to utter aloud; and she fled, relentless, to the deep, black pool.

But God works in his own way.

The visions melted into deep, unconscious sleep. He was awakened by a knock at the door, which seemed a repetition of what he had heard in his last sleeping moments.

It was Mrs. Hughes. She stood at the first word of permission within the room.

"Please, Sir, I think the young lady is very ill indeed, Sir; perhaps you would please to come to her."

"How is she ill?" said he, much alarmed.

"Quite quiet-like, Sir; but I think she is dying, that's all, indeed, Sir!"

"Go away, I will be with you directly!" he replied, his heart sinking within him.

In a very short time he was standing with Mrs. Hughes by Ruth's bedside. She lay as still as if she were dead, her eyes shut, her wan face numbed into a fixed anguish of expression. She did not speak when they spoke, though after a while they thought she strove to do so. But all power of motion and utterance had left her. She was dressed in everything, except her bonnet, as she had been the day before although sweet, thoughtful Mrs. Hughes, had provided her with night-gear, which lay on the little chest of drawers that served as a dressing-table. Mr. Benson lifted up her arm to feel her feeble, fluttering pulse and when he let go her hand, it fell upon the bed in a *dull heavy* way, as if she were already dead.

"You gave her some food," said he, anxiously, to Mrs. Hughes.

"Indeed, and I offered her the best in the house, but she shook her poor pretty head, and only asked if I would please to get her a cup of water. I brought her some milk though, and 'deed, I think she 'd rather have had the water; but not to seem sour and cross, she took some milk." By this time Mrs. Hughes was fairly crying.

"When does the doctor come up here?"

"Indeed, Sir, and he 's up nearly every day now, the inn is so full."

"I 'll go for him. And can you manage to undress her and lay her in bed? Open the window too, and get in the air; if her feet are cold, put bottles of hot water to them."

It was a proof of the true love, which was the nature of both, that it never crossed their minds to regret that this poor young creature had been thus thrown upon their hands. On the contrary, Mrs. Hughes called it a "a blessing."

"It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes."

CHAPTER X.

At the inn everything was life and bustle. Benson had to wait long in Mrs. Morgan's little p lour before she could come to him, and he kept gr ing more and more impatient. At last she made appearance and heard his story.

People may talk as they will about the little spect that is paid to virtue, unaccompanied by the ward accidents of wealth or station; but I rather th it will be found that, in the long run, true and sin virtue always has its proportionate reward in the spect and reverence of every one whose esteem worth having. To be sure, it is not rewarded a the way of the world as mere worldly possessions with low obeisance and lip-service; but all the be and more noble qualities in the hearts of others m ready and go forth to meet it on its appro provided only it be pure, simple, and unconscious its own existence.

Mr. Benson had little thought for outward tok of respect just then, nor had Mrs. Morgan m time to spare; but she smoothed her ruffled br and calmed her bustling manner, as soon as ever saw who it was that awaited her; for Mr. Ben was well known in the village where he had ta up his summer holiday among the mountains y after year, always a resident at the shop, and seld *spending* a shilling at the inn.

Mrs. Morgan listened patiently — for her.

"Mr. Jones will come this afternoon. But it is shame you should be troubled with such as her. I ad but little time yesterday, but I guessed there was omething wrong, and Gwen has just been telling me er bed has not been slept in. They were in a pretty urry to be gone yesterday, for all that the gentleman as not fit to travel, to my way of thinking; indeed, Villiam Wynn, the postboy, said he was weary nough before he got to the end of that Yspytty road; nd he thought they would have to rest there a day r two before they could go further than Pen trê 'oelas. Indeed, and anyhow, the servant is to follow iem with the baggage this very morning; and now I emember, William Wynn said they would wait for er. You'd better write a note, Mr. Benson, and tell iem her state."

It was good, though unpalatable advice. It came om one accustomed to bring excellent, if unrefined ense, to bear quickly upon any emergency, and to ecide rapidly. She was, in truth, so little accustomed) have her authority questioned, that before Mr. enson had made up his mind, she had produced aper, pens, and ink from the drawer in her bureau, laced them before him, and was going to leave the oom.

"Leave the note on this shelf, and trust me that goes by the maid. The boy that drives her there 1 the car shall bring you an answer back."

She was gone before he could rally his scattered enses enough to remember that he had not the ast idea *of the* name of the party to whom he *as to write.* *The* quiet leisure and peace of his

little study at home favoured his habit of reve
and long deliberation, just as her position as mistr
of an inn obliged her to quick, decisive ways.

Her advice, though good in some points, w
unpalatable in others. It was true that Ruth's co
dition ought to be known by those who were l
friends; but were these people to whom he was n
going to write, friends? He knew there was a r
mother, and a handsome, elegant son; and he h
also some idea of the circumstances which might
little extenuate their mode of quitting Ruth.
had wide enough sympathy to understand that
must have been a most painful position in wh
the mother had been placed, on finding herself un
the same roof with a girl, who was living with
son as Ruth was. And yet he did not like to ap
to her; to write to the son was still more out of
question, as it seemed like asking him to return.
through one or the other lay the only clue to
friends, who certainly ought to be made acquain
with her position. At length he wrote:

"MADAM,

"I write to tell you of the condition of the p
young woman" — (here came a long pause of d
beration) — "who accompanied your son on his
rival here, and who was left behind on your depart
yesterday. She is lying (as it appears to me) i
very dangerous state at my lodgings; and, if I n
suggest, it would be kind to allow your maid
return and attend upon her until she is sufficien
recovered to be restored to her friends, if, ind

hey could not come to take charge of her themelves.

"I remain, Madam,
"Your obedient servant,
"THURSTAN BENSON."

The note was very unsatisfactory after all his consideration, but it was the best he could do. He made inquiry of a passing servant as to the lady's name, directed the note, and placed it on the indicated shelf. He then returned to his lodgings, to await the doctor's coming, and the postboy's return. There was no alteration in Ruth; she was as one stunned into unconsciousness; she did not move her posture, she hardly breathed. From time to time Mrs. Hughes wetted her mouth with some liquid, and there was a little mechanical motion of the lips; that was the only sign of life she gave. The doctor came and shook his head, — "a thorough prostration of strength, occasioned by some great shock on the nerves," — and prescribed care and quiet, and mysterious medicines, but acknowledged that the result was doubtful, very doubtful. After his departure, Mr. Benson took his Welsh grammar and tried again to master the everpuzzling rules for the mutations of letters; but it was of no use, for his thoughts were absorbed by the life-in-death condition of the young creature, who was lately bounding and joyous.

The maid and the luggage, the car and the driver, had arrived before noon at their journey's end, and the note had been delivered. It annoyed Mrs. Bellingham *exceedingly. It* was the worst of these kind *of connexions,* there was no calculating the con-

sequences; they were never ending. All sorts (claims seemed to be established, and all sorts (people to step in to their settlement. The idea (sending her maid! Why, Simpson would not go she asked her. She soliloquized thus while readin the letter; and then, suddenly turning round t the favourite attendant, who had been listening t her mistress's remarks with no inattentive ear, she asked

"Simpson, would you go and nurse this creature as this —" she looked at the signature, — "Mr Benson, whoever he is, proposes?"

"Me! no, indeed, Ma'am," said the maid, draw ing herself up, stiff in her virtue. "I'm sure, Ma'am you would not expect it of me; I could never hav the face to dress a lady of character again."

"Well, well! don't be alarmed; I cannot spar you; by the way, just attend to the strings on m dress, the chambermaid here pulled them into knot and broke them terribly, last night. It is awkwar though, very," said she, relapsing into a musin fit over the condition of Ruth.

"If you 'll allow me, Ma'am, I think I migh say something that would alter the case. I believe Ma'am, you put a bank-note into the letter to th young woman yesterday?"

Mrs. Bellingham bowed acquiescence, and the mai went on:

"Because, Ma'am, when the little deformed ma wrote that note (he's Mr. Benson, Ma'am), I hav reason to believe neither he nor Mrs. Morgan knew of any provision being made for the young woman Me and the chambermaid found your letter and th bank-note lying quite promiscuous, like waste paper

on the floor of her room; for I believe she rushed out like mad after you left."

"That, as you say, alters the case. This letter, then, is principally a sort of delicate hint that some provision ought to have been made, which is true enough, only it has been attended to already; what became of the money?"

"Law, Ma'am! do you ask? Of course, as soon as I saw it, I picked it up and took it to Mrs. Morgan, in trust for the young person."

"Oh, that's right. What friends has she? Did you ever hear from Mason? — perhaps they ought to know where she is."

"Mrs. Mason did tell me, Ma'am, she was an orphan; with a guardian who was noways akin, and who washed his hands of her when she ran off; but Mrs. Mason was sadly put out, and went into hysterics, for fear you would think she had not seen after her enough, and that she might lose your custom; she said it was no fault of hers, for the girl was always a forward creature, boasting of her beauty, and saying how pretty she was, and striving to get where her good looks could be seen and admired, — one night in particular, Ma'am, at a county ball; and how Mrs. Mason had found out she used to meet Mr. Bellingham at an old woman's house, who was a regular old witch, Ma'am, and lives in the lowest part of the town, where all the bad characters haunt."

"There! that's enough," said Mrs. Bellingham, sharply, for the maid's chattering had outrun her tact; and in her anxiety to vindicate the character of her friend Mrs. Mason by blackening that of Ruth,

she had forgotten that she a little implicated mistress's son, whom his proud mother did not to imagine as ever passing through a low and graded part of the town.

"If she has no friends, and is the creature describe (which is confirmed by my own observati the best place for her is, as I said before, the Peni tiary. Her fifty pounds will keep her a week o if she is really unable to travel, and pay for journey; and if on her return to Fordham she wil me know, I will undertake to obtain her admis immediately."

"I 'm sure it 's well for her she has to do wi lady who will take any interest in her, after has happened."

Mrs. Bellingham called for her writing-desk, wrote a few hasty lines to be sent back by the boy, who was on the point of starting:

"Mrs. Bellingham presents her compliment her unknown correspondent, Mr. Benson, and beg inform him of a circumstance of which she beli he was ignorant when he wrote the letter with w she has been favoured; namely, that provision tc amount of 50*l.* was left for the unfortunate y person who is the subject of Mr. Benson's le This sum is in the hands of Mrs. Morgan, as we a note from Mrs. Bellingham to the miserable gir which she proposes to procure her admission intc Fordham Penitentiary, the best place for suc character, as by this profligate action she has feited the only friend remaining to her in the w *This proposition*, Mrs. Bellingham repeats; and *are the* young woman's best friends who

urge her to comply with the course now pointed out."

"Take care Mr. Bellingham hears nothing of this Mr. Benson's note," said Mrs. Bellingham, as she delivered the answer to her maid; "he is so sensitive just now that it would annoy him sadly, I am sure."

CHAPTER XI.

You have now seen the note which was delive into Mr. Benson's hands, as the cool shades of ev ing stole over the glowing summer sky. When had read it, he again prepared to write a few h lines before the post went out. The postboy was e now sounding his horn through the village as a sig for letters to be ready; and it was well that Mr. B son, in his long morning's meditation, had deci upon the course to be pursued, in case of such answer as that which he had received from Mrs. lingham. His present note was as follows:

"Dear Faith,

"You must come to this place directly, whe earnestly desire you and your advice. I am well self, so do not be alarmed. I have no time for planation, but I am sure you will not refuse me; me trust that I shall see you on Saturday at the la You know the mode by which I came; it is the both for expedition and cheapness. Dear Faith, not fail me.

"Your affectionate brother,

"Thurstan Benso

"P. S. — I am afraid the money I left may running short. Do not let this stop you. Take Facciolati to Johnson's, he will advance upon it; i *the third row*, bottom shelf. Only come."

When this letter was despatched he had done all
ı could; and the next two days passed like a long
onotonous dream of watching, thought, and care,
ıdisturbed by any event, hardly by the change from
ıy to night, which, now the harvest moon was at her
ll, was scarcely perceptible. On Saturday morning
e answer came.

"DEAREST THURSTAN,

"Your incomprehensible summons has just reached
e, and I obey, thereby proving my right to my name
: Faith. I shall be with you almost as soon as this
tter. I cannot help feeling anxious, as well as cu-
ous. I have money enough, and it is well I have;
ır Sally, who guards your room like a dragon, would
ıther see me walk the whole way, than have any of
our things disturbed.

"Your affectionate sister,

"FAITH BENSON."

It was a great relief to Mr. Benson to think that
is sister would so soon be with him. He had been
ccustomed from childhood to rely on her prompt
ıdgment and excellent sense; and to her care he felt
ıat Ruth ought to be consigned, as it was too much
ı go on taxing good Mrs. Hughes with night watch-
ıg, and sick nursing, with all her other claims on
er time. He asked her once more to sit by Ruth,
hile he went to meet his sister.

The coach passed by the foot of the steep ascent
hich led up to Llan-dhu. He took a boy to carry
is sister's *luggage* when she arrived; they were too
on at the bottom of the hill, and the boy began to

make ducks and drakes in the shallowest part of the stream, which there flowed glassy and smooth, while Mr. Benson sat down on a great stone, under the shadow of an alder-bush which grew where the green, flat meadow skirted the water. It was delightful to be once more in the open air, and away from the scenes and thoughts which had been pressing on him for the last three days. There was new beauty in everything: from the blue mountains which glimmered in the distant sunlight, down to the flat, rich, peaceful vale, with its calm round shadows, where he sat. The very margin of white pebbles which lay on the banks of the stream had a sort of cleanly beauty about it. He felt calmer and more at ease than he had done for some days; and yet, when he began to think, it was rather a strange story which he had to tell his sister, in order to account for his urgent summons. Here was he, sole friend and guardian of a poor sick girl, whose very name he did not know; about whom all that he did know was, that she had been the mistress of a man who had deserted her, and that he feared — he believed — she had contemplated suicide. The offence, too, was one for which his sister, good and kind as she was, had little compassion. Well, he must appeal to her love for him, which was a very unsatisfactory mode of proceeding, as he would far rather have had her interest in the girl founded on reason, or some less personal basis than showing it merely because her brother wished it.

The coach came slowly rumbling over the stony road. His sister was outside, but got down in a brisk *active* way, and greeted her brother heartily and affectionately. She was considerably taller than he was

and must have been very handsome; her black hair was parted plainly over her forehead, and her dark, expressive eyes and straight nose still retained the beauty of her youth. I do not know whether she was older than her brother, but, probably owing to his infirmity requiring her care, she had something of a mother's manner towards him.

"Thurstan, you are looking pale! I do not believe you are well, whatever you may say. Have you had the old pain in your back?"

"No — a little — never mind that, dearest Faith. Sit down here, while I send the boy up with your box." And then, with some little desire to show his sister how well he was acquainted with the language, he blundered out his directions in very grammatical Welsh; so grammatical, in fact, and so badly pronounced, that the boy, scratching his head, made answer,

"Dim Saesoneg."

So he had to repeat it in English.

"Well now, Thurstan, here I sit as you bid me. But don't try me too long; tell me why you sent for me."

Now came the difficulty, and oh! for a seraph's tongue, and a seraph's powers of representation! but there was no seraph at hand, only the soft running waters singing a quiet tune, and predisposing Miss Benson to listen with a soothed spirit to any tale, not immediately involving her brother's welfare, which had been the cause of her seeing that lovely vale.

"It is an awkward story to tell, Faith, but there is a *young woman* lying ill at my lodgings whom I *wanted you to nurse.*"

He thought he saw a shadow on his sister's face and detected a slight change in her voice as sh spoke.

"Nothing very romantic, I hope, Thurstan. Re member, I cannot stand much romance; I alway distrust it."

"I don't know what you mean by romance. Th story is real enough, and not out of the common wa I'm afraid."

He paused; he did not get over the difficulty.

"Well, tell it me at once, Thurstan. I am afra you have let some one, or perhaps only your ow imagination, impose upon you; but don't try my pa tience too much; you know I've no great stock."

"Then I'll tell you. The young girl was brough to the inn here by a gentleman, who has left her; sh is very ill, and has no one to see after her."

Miss Benson had some masculine tricks, and or was whistling a long low whistle, when surprised displeased. She had often found it a useful vent f feelings, and she whistled now. Her brother wo rather she had spoken.

"Have you sent for her friends?" she aked at l

"She has none."

Another pause and another whistle, but ra softer and more wavering than the last.

"How is she ill?"

"Pretty nearly as quiet as if she were dead. does not speak, or move, or even sigh."

"It would be better for her to die at on think."

"Faith!"

That one word put them right. It was sp

he tone which had authority over her; it was so full of grieved surprise and mournful upbraiding. She was accustomed to exercise a sway over him, owing to her greater decision of character; and, probably, if everything were traced to its cause, to her superior vigour of constitution; but a times she was humbled before his pure, child-like nature, and felt where she was inferior. She was too good and true to conceal this feeling, or to resent its being forced upon her. After a time she said,

"Thurstan, dear, let us go to her."

She helped him with tender care, and gave him her arm up the long and tedious hill; but when they approached the village, without speaking a word on the subject, they changed their position, and she leant (apparently) on him. He stretched himself up into as vigorous a gait as he could, when they drew near to the abodes of men.

On the way they had spoken but little. He had asked after various members of his congregation, for he was a Dissenting minister in a country-town, and she had answered; but they neither of them spoke of Ruth, though their minds were full of her.

Mrs. Hughes had tea ready for the traveller on her arrival. Mr. Benson chafed a little internally, at the leisurely way in which his sister sipped and sipped, and paused to tell him some trifling particular respecting home affairs, which she had forgotten before.

"Mr. Bradshaw has refused to let the children associate with the Dixons any longer, because one evening they played at acting charades."

"Indeed; — *a little* more bread and butter, Faith?"

"*Thank you.* This Welsh air does make one

hungry. Mrs. Bradshaw is paying poor old Maggie's rent, to save her from being sent into the workhouse.'

"That's right. Won't you have another cup o tea?"

"I have had two. However, I think I'll tak another."

Mr. Benson could not refrain from a little sigh a he poured it out. He thought he had never seen hi sister so deliberately hungry and thirsty before. H did not guess that she was feeling the meal rather respite from a distasteful interview, which she wa aware was awaiting her at its conclusion. But al things come to an end, and so did Miss Benson's tea

"Now, will you go and see her?"

"Yes."

And so they went. Mrs. Hughes had pinned up piece of green calico, by way of a Venetian blind, t shut out the afternoon sun; and in the light thu shaded lay Ruth, still, and wan, and white. Eve with her brother's account of Ruth's state, such death like quietness startled Miss Benson — startled he into pity for the poor lovely creature who lay thu stricken and felled. When she saw her, she could n longer imagine her to be an impostor, or a hardene sinner; such prostration of woe belonged to neithe Mr. Benson looked more at his sister's face than a Ruth's; he read her countenance as a book.

Mrs. Hughes stood by, crying.

Mr. Benson touched his sister, and they left th room together.

"Do you think she will live?" asked he.

"I cannot tell," said Miss Benson, in a softene voice. "But how young she looks! Quite a child

poor creature! When will the doctor come, Thurstan? Tell me all about her; you have never told me the particulars."

Mr. Benson might have said, she had never cared to hear them before, and had rather avoided the subject; but he was too happy to see this awakening of interest in his sister's warm heart to say anything in the least reproachful. He told her the story as well as he could; and, as he felt it deeply, he told it with heart's eloquence; and, as he ended and looked at her, there were tears in the eyes of both.

"And what does the doctor say?" asked she, after a pause.

"He insists upon quiet; he orders medicines and strong broth. I cannot tell you all; Mrs. Hughes can. She has been so truly good. 'Doing good, hoping for nothing again.'"

"She looks very sweet and gentle. I shall sit up to-night and watch her myself; and I shall send you and Mrs. Hughes early to bed, for you have both a worn look about you I don't like. Are you sure the effect of that fall has gone off? Do you feel anything of it in your back still? After all, I owe her something for turning back to your help. Are you sure she was going to drown herself?"

"I cannot be sure, for I have not questioned her. She has not been in a state to be questioned; but I have no doubt whatever about it. But you must not think of sitting up after your journey, Faith."

"Answer me, Thurstan. Do you feel any bad effect from that fall?"

"*No, hardly any.* Don't sit up, Faith, to-night!"

"*Thurstan, it's* no use talking, for I shall; and, if

you go on opposing me, I dare say I shall attack y back, and put a blister on it. Do tell me what 'hardly any' means. Besides, to set you quite at e you know I have never seen mountains before, they fill me and oppress me so much that I could sleep; I must keep awake this first night, and see they don't fall on the earth and overwhelm it. now answer my questions about yourself."

Miss Benson had the power, which some pe have, of carrying her wishes through to their fi ment; her will was strong, her sense was excel and people yielded to her — they did not know Before ten o'clock she reigned sole power and pc tate in Ruth's little chamber. Nothing could have l better devised for giving her an interest in the inv The very dependence of one so helpless upon her inclined her heart towards her. She thought she ceived a slight improvement in the symptoms du the night, and she was a little pleased that this gress should have been made while she reigned mon of the sick-room. Yes, certainly there was an impr ment. There was more consciousness in the loo the eyes, although the whole countenance still reta its painful traces of acute suffering, manifested i anxious, startled, uneasy aspect. It was broad mor light, though barely five o'clock, when Miss Be caught the sight of Ruth's lips moving, as if in spe Miss Benson stooped down to listen.

"Who are you?" asked Ruth, in the faintes whispers.

"Miss Benson — Mr. Benson's sister," she rep

The words conveyed no knowledge to Ruth; *the contrary*, weak as a babe in mind and body s

was, her lip began to quiver, and her eyes to show a error similar to that of any little child who wakens n the presence of a stranger, and sees no dear, fa- miliar face of mother or nurse to reassure its trem- ling heart.

Miss Benson took her hand in hers, and began to troke it caressingly.

"Don't be afraid, dear; I'm a friend come to take are of you. Would you like some tea now, my ove?"

The very utterance of these gentle words was un- cking Miss Benson's heart. Her brother was sur- rised to see her so full of interest, when he came to quire later on in the morning. It required Mrs. ughes's persuasions, as well as his own, to induce er to go to bed for an hour or two after breakfast; nd, before she went, she made them promise that she ould be called when the doctor came. He did not me until late in the afternoon. The invalid was llying fast, though rallying to a consciousness of rrow, as was evinced by the tears which came slowly lling down her pale sad cheeks — tears which she id not the power to wipe away.

Mr. Benson had remained in the house all day to ear the doctor's opinion; and now that he was relieved om the charge of Ruth by his sister's presence, he id the more time to dwell upon the circumstances of er case — so far as they were known to him. He membered his first sight of her; her little figure vaying to and fro as she balanced herself on the slip- ry stones, half smiling at her own dilemma, with a ight, happy light in the eyes that seemed like a re- ction from the glancing waters sparkling below.

Then he recalled the changed, affrighted look of those eyes as they met his, after the child's rebuff of her advances; — how that little incident filled up the tale at which Mrs. Hughes had hinted, in a kind of sorrowful way, as if loth (as a Christian should be) to believe evil. Then that fearful evening, when he had only just saved her from committing suicide, and that night-mare sleep! And now, lost, forsaken, and but just delivered from the jaws of death, she lay dependent for everything on his sister and him, — utter strangers a few weeks ago. Where was her lover? Could he be easy and happy? Could he grow into perfect health, with these great sins pressing on his conscience with a strong and hard pain? Or had he a conscience?

Into whole labyrinths of social ethics Mr. Benson's thoughts wandered, when his sister entered suddenly and abruptly.

"What does the doctor say? Is she better?"

"Oh, yes! she's better," answered Miss Benson, sharp and short. Her brother looked at her in dismay. She bumped down into a chair in a cross, disconcerted manner. They were both silent for a few minutes; only Miss Benson whistled and clucked alternately.

"What is the matter, Faith? You say she is better."

"Why, Thurstan, there is something so shocking the matter, that I cannot tell you."

Mr. Benson changed colour with affright. All things possible and impossible crossed his mind, but the right one. I said "all things possible;" I made a mistake. He never believed Ruth to be more guilty than she seemed.

"*Faith*, I wish you would tell me, and not bewilder *me with those* noises of yours," said he, nervously.

"I beg your pardon; but something so shocking has just been discovered — I don't know how to word it — She will have a child. The doctor says so."

She was allowed to make noises unnoticed for a few minutes. Her brother did not speak. At last she wanted his sympathy.

"Isn't it shocking, Thurstan? You might have knocked me down with a straw when he told me."

"Does she know?"

"Yes; and I am not sure that that isn't the worst part of all."

"How? — what do you mean?"

"Oh! I was just beginning to have a good opinion of her, but I'm afraid she is very depraved. After the doctor was gone, she pulled the bed-curtain aside, and looked as if she wanted to speak to me. (I can't think how she heard, for we were close to the window, and spoke very low.) Well, I went to her, though I really had taken quite a turn against her. And she whispered, quite eagerly, 'Did he say I should have a baby?' Of course, I could not keep it from her; but I thought it my duty to look as cold and severe as I could. She did not seem to understand how it ought to be viewed, but took it just as if she had a right to have a baby. She said, 'Oh, my God, I thank thee! Oh! I will be so good!' I had no patience with her then, so I left the room."

"Who is with her?"

"Mrs. Hughes. She is not seeing the thing in a moral light, as I should have expected."

Mr. Benson was silent again. After some time he began:

"Faith, I don't see this affair quite as you I believe I am right."

"You surprise me, brother! I don't ur stand you."

"Wait awhile! I want to make my feelings clear to you, but I don't know where to begin how to express myself."

"It is, indeed, an extraordinary subject for have to talk about; but if once I get clear of this I 'll wash my hands of all such cases again."

Her brother was not attending to her; he wa ducing his own ideas to form.

"Faith, do you know I rejoice in this cl advent."

"May God forgive you, Thurstan! — if you l what you are saying. But, surely, it is a tempt dear Thurstan."

"I do not think it is a delusion. The sin ap to me to be quite distinct from its consequences."

"Sophistry — and a temptation," said Miss son, decidedly.

"No, it is not," said her brother, with equal sion. "In the eye of God, she is exactly the sar if the life she has led had left no trace behind. knew her errors before, Faith."

"Yes, but not this disgrace — this badge o shame!"

"Faith, Faith! let me beg of you not to spe of the little innocent babe, who may be God's senger to lead her back to Him. Think again o first words — the burst of nature from her h *Did she* not turn to God, and enter into a cov *with Him* — 'I will be so good?' Why, it drav

ut of herself! If her life has hitherto been self-
eking, and wickedly thoughtless, here is the very
istrument to make her forget herself, and be thought-
l for another. Teach her (and God will teach her,
man does not come between) to reverence her child;
id this reverence will shut out sin, — will be puri-
ation."

He was very much excited; he was even surprised his own excitement; but his thoughts and meditations through the long afternoon had prepared his ind for this manner of viewing the subject.

"These are quite new ideas to me," said Miss enson, coldly. "I think, you, Thurstan, are the st person I ever heard rejoicing over the birth of illegitimate child. It appears to me, I must own, ther questionable morality."

"I do not rejoice. I have been all this afternoon ourning over the sin which has blighted this young eature; I have been dreading lest, as she recovered nsciousness, there should be a return of her despair. have been thinking of every holy word, every prose to the penitent — of the tenderness which led e Magdalen aright. I have been feeling, severely d reproachfully, the timidity which has hitherto made e blink all encounter with evils of this particular nd. Oh, Faith! once for all, do not accuse me of estionable morality, when I am trying more than er I did in my life to act as my blessed Lord would ve done."

He was very much agitated. His sister hesitated, d then she spoke more softly than before.

"*But, Thurstan,* everything might have been done

to 'lead her right' (as you call it), without this child, this miserable offspring of sin."

"The world has, indeed, made such children miserable, innocent as they are; but I doubt if this be according to the will of God, unless it be His punishment for the parents' guilt; and even then the world's way of treatment is too apt to harden the mother's natural love into something like hatred. Shame, and the terror of friends' displeasure, turn her mad — defile her holiest instincts; and, as for the fathers — God forgive them! I cannot — at least, not just now."

Miss Benson thought on what her brother said. At length she asked, "Thurstan (remember I 'm not convinced), how would you have this girl treated according to your theory?"

"It will require some time, and much Christian love, to find out the best way. I know I 'm not very wise; but the way I think it would be right to act in, would be this —" He thought for some time before he spoke, and then said:

"She has incurred a responsibility — that we both acknowledge. She is about to become a mother, and have the direction and guidance of a little tender life. I fancy such a responsibility must be serious and solemn enough, without making it into a heavy and oppressive burden, so that human nature recoils from bearing it. While we do all we can to strengthen her sense of responsibility, I would likewise do all we can to make her feel that it is responsibility for what may become a blessing."

"Whether the children are legitimate or illegitimate?" asked Miss Benson, drily.

"*Yes!*" said her brother, firmly. "The more I think,

the more I believe I am right. No one," said he, blushing faintly as he spoke, "can have a greater recoil from profligacy than I have. You yourself have not greater sorrow over this young creature's sin than I have: the difference is this, you confuse the consequences with the sin."

"I don't understand metaphysics."

"I am not aware that I am talking metaphysics. I can imagine that if the present occasion be taken rightly, and used well, all that is good in her may be raised to a height unmeasured but by God; while all that is evil and dark may, by His blessing, fade and disappear in the pure light of her child's presence. Oh, Father! listen to my prayer, that her redemption may date from this time. Help us to speak to her in the loving spirit of thy Holy Son!"

The tears were full in his eyes; he almost trembled in his earnestness. He was faint with the strong power of his own conviction, and with his inability to move his sister. But she was shaken. She sat very still for a quarter of an hour or more, while he leaned back, exhausted by his own feelings.

"The poor child!" said she, at length — "the poor, poor child! what it will have to struggle through and endure! Do you remember Thomas Wilkins, and the way he threw the registry of his birth and baptism back in your face? Why, he would not have the situation; he went to sea and was drowned, rather than present the record of his shame."

"I do remember it all. It has often haunted me. She must *strengthen* her child to look to God, rather *than to man's opinion*. It will be the discipline, the

penance, she has incurred. She must teach it t
(humanly speaking) self-dependent."

"But after all," said Miss Benson (for she
known and esteemed poor Thomas Wilkins, and
mourned over his untimely death, and the reco
tion thereof softened her) — "after all, it migh
concealed. The very child need never know its il
timacy."

"How?" asked her brother.

"Why — we know so little about her yet; b
that letter, it said she had no friends; — now, c
she not go into quite a fresh place, and be passe
as a widow?"

Ah, tempter! unconscious tempter! Here w
way of evading the trials for the poor little un
child, of which Mr. Benson had never thought.
was the decision — the pivot, on which the fa
years moved; and he turned it the wrong way.
it was not for his own sake. For himself, he
brave enough to tell the truth; for the little hel
baby, about to enter a cruel, biting world, he
tempted to evade the difficulty. He forgot wha
had just said, of the discipline and the penance t
mother consisting in strengthening her child to
trustfully and bravely, the consequences of her
weakness. He remembered more clearly the wild fi
ness, the Cain-like look, of Thomas Wilkins, a
obnoxious word in the baptismal registry told him
he must go forth branded into the world, with his
against every man's, and every man's against him

"How could it be managed, Faith?"

"*Nay*, I must know much more, which she

ı tell us, before I can see how it is to be managed. is certainly the best plan."

"Perhaps it is," said her brother, thoughtfully, but longer clearly or decidedly; and so the conversaı dropped.

Ruth moved the bed-curtain aside, in her soft nner, when Miss Benson re-entered the room; she not speak, but she looked at her as if she wished to come near. Miss Benson went and stood by . Ruth took her hand in hers and kissed it; then, if fatigued even by this slight movement, she fell ep.

Miss Benson took up her work, and thought over brother's speeches. She was not convinced, but was softened and belwildered.

CHAPTER XII.

Miss Benson continued in an undecided state mind for the two next days; but on the third, as th sat at breakfast, she began to speak to her brother.

"That young creature's name is Ruth Hilton."

"Indeed! how did you find it out?"

"From herself, of course. She is much strong I slept with her last night, and I was aware she w awake long before I liked to speak, but at last I beg I don't know what I said, or how it went on, but think it was a little relief to her to tell me somethi about herself. She sobbed and cried herself to sle I think she is asleep now."

"Tell me what she said about herself."

"Oh, it was really very little; it was evidently most painful subject. She is an orphan, without b ther or sister, and with a guardian, whom, I think s said, she never saw but once. He apprenticed l (after her father's death) to a dressmaker. This M Bellingham got acquainted with her, and they used meet on Sunday afternoons. One day they were la lingering on the road, when the dressmaker came by accident. She seems to have been very ang and not unnaturally so. The girl took fright at l threats, and the lover persuaded her to go off w him to London, there and then. Last May, I thi *it was.* That's all."

"*Did* she express any sorrow for her error?"

"No, not in words, but her voice was broken with sobs, though she tried to make it steady. After a while she began to talk about her baby, but shyly, and with much hesitation. She asked me, how much I thought she could earn as a dressmaker, by working very, very hard; and that brought us round to her child. I thought of what you had said, Thurstan, and I tried to speak to her as you wished me. I am not sure if it was right; I am doubtful in my own mind still."

"Don't be doubtful, Faith! Dear Faith, I thank you for your kindness."

"There is really nothing to thank me for. It is almost impossible to help being kind to her; there is something so meek and gentle about her, so patient, and so grateful!"

"What does she think of doing?"

"Poor child! she thinks of taking lodgings — very cheap ones, she says; there she means to work night and day to earn enough for her child. For, she said to me, with such pretty earnestness, 'it must never know want, whatever I do. I have deserved suffering, but it will be such a little innocent darling!' Her utmost earnings would not be more than seven or eight shillings a week, I 'm afraid; and then she is so young and so pretty!"

"There is that fifty pounds Mrs. Morgan brought me, and those two letters. Does she know about them yet?"

"No; I did not like to tell her till she is a little stronger. *Oh, Thurstan!* I wish there was not this *prospect of a child.* I cannot help it. I do — I could

see a way in which we might help her, if it were not for that."

"How do you mean?"

"Oh, it 's no use thinking of it, as it is! Or else we might have taken her home with us, and kept her till she had got a little dress-making in the congregation, but for this meddlesome child; that spoils everything. You must let me grumble to you, Thurstan. I was very good to her, and spoke as tenderly and respectfully of the little thing as if it were the Queen's, and born in lawful matrimony."

"That 's right, my dear Faith! Grumble away to me, if you like. I 'll forgive you, for the kind thought of taking her home with us. But do you think her situation is an insuperable objection?"

"Why, Thurstan! — it 's so insuperable, it puts it quite out of the question."

"How? — that 's only repeating your objection. Why is it out of the question?"

"If there had been no child coming, we might have called her by her right name — Miss Hilton; that 's one thing. Then, another is, the baby in our house. Why, Sally would go distraught!"

"Never mind Sally. If she were an orphan relation of our own, left widowed," said he, pausing, as if in doubt. "You yourself suggested she should be considered as a widow, for the child's sake. I 'm only taking up your ideas, dear Faith. I respect you for thinking of taking her home; it is just what we ought to do. Thank you for reminding me of my duty."

"Nay, it was only a passing thought. Think of *Mr. Bradshaw*. Oh! I tremble at the thought of his *grim displeasure*."

"We must think of a higher than Mr. Bradshaw. I own I should be a very coward, if he knew. He is so severe, so inflexible. But after all he sees so little of us; he never comes to tea, you know, but is always engaged when Mrs. Bradshaw comes. I don't think he knows of what our household consists."

"Not know Sally? Oh yes, but he does. He asked Mrs. Bradshaw one day, if she knew what wages we gave her, and said we might get a far more efficient and younger servant for the money. And, speaking about money, think what our expenses would be if we took her home for the next six months."

That consideration was a puzzling one; and both sat silent and perplexed for a time. Miss Benson was as sorrowful as her brother, for she was becoming as anxious as he was to find it possible that her plan could be carried out.

"There's the fifty pounds," said he, with a sigh of reluctance at the idea.

"Yes, there's the fifty pounds," echoed his sister, with the same sadness in her tone. "I suppose it is hers."

"I suppose it is; and being so, we must not think who gave it to her. It will defray her expenses. I am very sorry, but I think we must take it."

"It would never do to apply to him under the present circumstances," said Miss Benson, in a hesitating manner.

"No, that we won't," said her brother, decisively. "If she consents to let us take care of her, we will never let her stoop to request anything from him, even for his child. She can live on bread and water. We can *all live on bread* and water rather than that."

"Then I will speak to her and propose the plan. Oh, Thurstan! from a child you could persuade me to anything! I hope I am doing right. However much I oppose you at first, I am sure to yield; soon almost in proportion to my violence at first. I think I am very weak."

"No, not in this instance. We are both right; I, in the way in which the child ought to be viewed; you, dear good Faith, for thinking of taking her home with us. God bless you, dear, for it!"

When Ruth began to sit up (and the strange, new, delicious prospect of becoming a mother seemed to give her some mysterious source of strength, so that her recovery was rapid and swift from that time), Miss Benson brought her the letters and the bank-note.

"Do you recollect receiving this letter, Ruth?" asked she, with grave gentleness. Ruth changed colour, and took it and read it again without making any reply to Miss Benson. Then she sighed, and thought a while; and then took up and read the second note—the note which Mrs. Bellingham had sent to Mr. Benson in answer to his. After that she took up the bank-note and turned it round and round, but not as if she saw it. Miss Benson noticed that her fingers trembled sadly, and that her lips were quivering for some time before she spoke.

"If you please, Miss Benson, I should like to return this money."

"Why, my dear?"

"I have a strong feeling against taking it. While *he," said she*, deeply blushing, and letting her large *white lids* drop down and veil her eyes, "loved me

he gave me many things — my watch — oh, many things; and I took them from him gladly and thankfully because he loved me — for I would have given him anything — and I thought of them as signs of love. But this money pains my heart. He has left off loving me, and has gone away. This money seems — oh, Miss Benson — it seems as if he could comfort me, for being forsaken, by money." And at that word, the tears so long kept back and repressed, forced their way like rain.

She checked herself, however, in the violence of her emotion, for she thought of her child.

"So, will you take the trouble of sending it back to Mrs. Bellingham?"

"That I will, my dear. I am glad of it, that I am! They don't deserve to have the power of giving: they don't deserve that you should take it."

Miss Benson went and enclosed it up, there, and then; simply writing these words in the envelope, "From Ruth Hilton."

"And now we wash our hands of these Bellinghams," said she, triumphantly. But Ruth looked tearful and sad; not about returning the note, but from the conviction that the reason she had given for the ground of her determination was true — he no longer loved her.

To cheer her, Miss Benson began to speak of the future. Miss Benson was one of those people who, the more she spoke of a plan in its details, and the more she realised it in her own mind, the more firmly she became a partisan of the project. Thus she grew warm and happy in the idea of taking Ruth home; but Ruth remained depressed and languid under the

conviction that he no longer loved her. No home, future, but the thought of her child, could wean l from this sorrow. Miss Benson was a little piqu and this pique showed itself afterwards in talking her brother of the morning's proceedings in the si chamber.

"I admired her at the time for sending away fifty pounds so proudly; but I think she has a c heart: she hardly thanked me at all for my propc of taking her home with us."

"Her thoughts are full of other things just n and people have such different ways of showing feeli some by silence, some by words. At any rate, i unwise to expect gratitude."

"What do you expect — not indifference or gratitude?"

"It is better not to expect or calculate consequen The longer I live, the more fully I see that. Let try simply to do right actions, without thinking of feelings they are to call out in others. We know t no holy or self-denying effort can fall to the gro vain and useless; but the sweep of eternity is la and God alone knows when the effect is to be p duced. We are trying to do right now, and to right; don't let us perplex ourselves with endeavour to map out how she should feel, or how she sho show her feelings."

"That's all very fine, and I dare say very tru said Miss Benson, a little chagrined. "But 'a bird the hand is worth two in the bush;' and I wo rather have had one good, hearty 'Thank you,' n *for all* I have been planning to do for her, than *grand effects* you promise me in the 'sweep of e

nity.' "Don't be grave and sorrowful, Thurstan, or I'll go out of the room. I can stand Sally's scoldings, but I can't bear your look of quiet depression whenever I am a little hasty or impatient. I had rather you would give me a good box on the ear."

"And I would often rather you would speak, if ever so hastily, instead of whistling. So, if I box your ears when I am vexed with you, will you promise to scold me when you are put out of the way, instead of whistling?"

"Very well! that's a bargain. You box, and I scold. But, seriously, I began to calculate our money when she so cavalierly sent off the fifty-pound note (I can't help admiring her for it), and I am very much afraid we shall not have enough to pay the doctor's bill, and take her home with us."

"She must go inside the coach whatever we do," said Mr. Benson, decidedly. "Who's there? Come in! Oh! Mrs. Hughes! Sit down."

"Indeed, Sir, and I cannot stay; but the young lady has just made me find up her watch for her, and asked me to get it sold to pay the doctor, and the little things she has had since she came; and please, Sir, indeed, I don't know where to sell it nearer than Caernarvon."

"That is good of her," said Miss Benson, her sense of justice satisfied; and, remembering the way in which Ruth had spoken of the watch, she felt what a sacrifice it must have been to resolve to part with it.

"And her goodness just helps us out of our dilemma," said her brother; who was unaware of the feelings *with which* Ruth regarded her watch, or, *perhaps, he might have* parted with his Facciolati.

Mrs. Hughes patiently awaited their leisu
answering her practical question. Where coul
watch be sold? Suddenly her face brightened.

"Mr. Jones, the doctor, is just going to b
ried, perhaps he would like nothing better t
give this pretty watch to his bride; indeed,
think it 's very. likely; and he 'll pay money fo
well as letting alone his bill. I 'll ask him, S
any rate."

Mr. Jones was only too glad to obtain pos
of so elegant a present at so cheap a rate. He
as Mrs. Hughes had foretold, "paid money fo
more than was required to defray the expen
Ruth's accommodation; as most of the articles c
she had were paid for at the time by Mr. o
Benson, but they strictly forbade Mrs. Hughes
Ruth of this.

"Would you object to my buying you a
gown?" said Miss Benson to her, the day aft
sale of the watch. She hesitated a little, an
went on:

"My brother and I think it would be better
you — as if in fact you were — a widow.
save much awkwardness, and it will spare you
much —" Mortification she was going to have
but that word did not exactly do. But, at the
tion of her child, Ruth started and turned rub
as she always did when allusion was made to it

"Oh, yes! certainly. Thank you much for
ing of it. Indeed," said she, very low, as if t
self, "I don't know how to thank you for all y
doing; but I do love you, and will pray for yo
may."

"If you may, Ruth!" repeated Miss Benson, in a ne of surprise.

"Yes, if I may. If you will let me pray for you."

"Certainly, my dear. My dear Ruth, you don't ow how often I sin; I do so wrong, with my few nptations. We are both of us great sinners in the es of the Most Holy; let us pray for each other. on't speak so again, my dear; at least, not to me!"

Miss Benson was actually crying. She had always oked upon herself as so inferior to her brother in l goodness; had seen such heights above her, that e was distressed by Ruth's humility. After a short ne she resumed the subject.

"Then I may get you a black gown? — and we y call you Mrs. Hilton?"

"No; not Mrs. Hilton!" said Ruth, hastily.

Miss Benson, who had hitherto kept her eyes erted from Ruth's face from a motive of kindly de-acy, now looked at her with surprise.

"Why not?" asked she.

"It was my mother's name," said Ruth, in a low ice. "I had better not be called by it."

"Then, let us call you by my mother's name," id Miss Benson, tenderly. "She would have — t I'll talk to you about my mother some other ne. Let me call you Mrs. Denbigh. It will do ry well, too. People will think you are a distant lation."

When she told Mr. Benson of this choice of name, was rather sorry; it was like his sister's impulsive ndness — impulsive in everything — and he could agine *how Ruth's* humility had touched her. He *s sorry, but he said* nothing.

And now the letter was written home, announcing the probable arrival of the brother and sister on a certain day, "with a distant relation, early left a widow," as Miss Benson expressed it. She desired the spare-room might be prepared, and made every provision she could think of for Ruth's comfort; for Ruth still remained feeble and weak.

When the black gown, at which she had stitched away incessantly, was finished — when nothing remained but to rest for the next day's journey — Ruth could not sit still. She wandered from window to window, learning off each rock and tree by heart. Each had its tale, which it was agony to remember; but which it would have been worse agony to forget. The sound of running waters she heard that quiet evening, was in her ears as she lay on her death-bed; so well had she learnt their tune.

And now all was over. She had driven in to Llan-dhu, sitting by her lover's side, living in the bright present, and strangely forgetful of the past or the future; she had dreamed out her dream, and she had awakened from the vision of love. She walked slowly and sadly down the long hill, her tears fast falling, but as quickly wiped away; while she strove to make steady the low quivering voice which was often called upon to answer some remark of Miss Benson's.

They had to wait for the coach. Ruth buried her face in some flowers which Mrs. Hughes had given her on parting; and was startled when the mail drew up with a sudden pull, which almost threw the horses on their haunches. She was placed inside, and the coach had set off again, before she was fully aware

that Mr. and Miss Benson were travelling on the outside; but it was a relief to feel she might now cry without exciting their notice. The shadow of a heavy thunder-cloud was on the valley, but the little upland village-church (that showed the spot in which so much of her life had passed) stood out clear in the sunshine. She grudged the tears that blinded her as she gazed. There was one passenger, who tried after a while to comfort her.

"Don't cry, Miss," said the kind-hearted woman. "You're parting from friends, maybe? Well, that's bad enough, but when you come to my age, you'll think none of it. Why, I've three sons, and they're soldiers and sailors, all of them — here, there, and everywhere. One is in America, beyond seas; another is in China, making tea; and another is at Gibraltar, three miles from Spain; and yet, you see, I can laugh and eat and enjoy myself. I sometimes think I'll try and fret a bit, just to make myself a better figure; but, Lord! it's no use, it's against my nature; so I laugh and grow fat again. I'd be quite thankful for a fit of anxiety as would make me feel easy in my clothes, which them manty-makers will make so tight I'm fairly throttled."

Ruth durst cry no more; it was no relief, now she was watched and noticed, and plied with a sandwich or a gingerbread each time she looked sad. She lay back with her eyes shut, as if asleep, and went on, and on, the sun never seeming to move from his high place in the sky, nor the bright hot day to show the least sign of waning. Every now and then, Miss Benson scrambled down, and made kind inquiries of the pale, weary Ruth; and once they changed coaches,

and the fat old lady left her with a hearty shake of the hand.

"It is not much further now," said Miss Benson, apologetically, to Ruth. "See! we are losing sight of the Welsh mountains. We have about eighteen miles of plain, and then we come to the moors and the rising ground, amidst which Eccleston lies. I wish we were there, for my brother is sadly tired."

The first wonder in Ruth's mind was, why then, if Mr. Benson were so tired, did they not stop where they were for the night; for she knew little of the expenses of a night at an inn. The next thought was, to beg that Mr. Benson would take her place inside the coach, and allow her to mount up by Miss Benson. She proposed this, and Miss Benson was evidently pleased.

"Well, if you 're not tired, it would be a rest and a change for him, to be sure; and if you were by me I could show you the first sight of Eccleston, if we reach there before it is quite dark."

So Mr. Benson got down, and changed places with Ruth.

She hardly yet understood the numerous small economies which he and his sister had to practise — the little daily self-denials, — all endured so cheerfully, and simply, that they had almost ceased to require an effort, and it had become natural to them to think of others before themselves. Ruth had not understood that it was for economy that their places had been taken on the outside of the coach, while hers, as an invalid requiring rest, was to be the inside; and that the biscuits which supplied the place of a dinner were, in fact, chosen because the difference in price between the two would go a little way

towards fulfilling their plan for receiving her as an inmate. Her thought about money had been hitherto a child's thought; the subject had never touched her; but afterwards, when she had lived a little while with the Bensons, her eyes were opened, and she remembered their simple kindness on the journey, and treasured the remembrance of it in her heart.

A low grey cloud was the first sign of Eccleston; it was the smoke of the town hanging over the plain. Beyond the place where she was expected to believe it existed, arose round, waving uplands; nothing to the fine outlines of the Welsh mountains, but still going up nearer to heaven than the rest of the flat world into which she had now entered. Rumbling stones, lamp-posts, a sudden stop, and they were in the town of Eccleston; and a strange, uncouth voice, on the dark side of the coach, was heard to say,

"Be ye there, measter?"

"Yes, yes!" said Miss Benson, quickly. "Did Sally send you, Ben? Get the ostler's lantern, and look out the luggage."

CHAPTER XIII.

Miss Benson had resumed every morsel briskness which she had rather lost in the m the day; her foot was on her native stones, very rough set they were, and she was near h and among known people. Even Mr. Benso very cheerfully to Ben, and made many inqu him respecting people whose names were str Ruth. She was cold, and utterly weary. S Miss Benson's offered arm, and could hardly d self as far as the little quiet street in which M son's house was situated. The street was s that their footsteps sounded like a loud dis and announced their approach as effectuall "trumpet's lordly blare" did the coming of A A door flew open, and a lighted passage stood them. As soon as they had entered, a stou servant emerged from behind the door, her f diant with welcome.

"Eh, bless ye! are ye back again? I thc should ha' been lost without ye."

She gave Mr. Benson a hearty shake o! th and kissed Miss Benson warmly; then, turn Ruth, she said, in a loud whisper,

"Who 's yon?"

Mr. Benson was silent, and walked a st *wards.* Miss Benson said boldly out,

"The lady I named in my note, Sally — Mrs.)enbigh, a distant relation."

"Ay, but you said hoo was a widow. Is this chit widow?"

"Yes, this is Mrs. Denbigh," answered Miss enson.

"If I'd been her mother, I'd ha' given her a illypop instead on a husband Hoo looks fitter r it."

"Hush! Sally, Sally! Look, there's your master ying to move that heavy box." Miss Benson calılated well when she called Sally's attention to her aster; for it was believed by every one, and by Sally erself, that his deformity was owing to a fall he had ad, when he was scarcely more than a baby, and enusted to her care — a little nurse-girl, as she then as, not many years older than himself. For years, ıe poor girl had cried herself to sleep on her palleted, moaning over the blight her carelessness had rought upon her darling; nor was this self-reproach iminished by the forgiveness of the gentle mother, om whom Thurstan Benson derived so much of his ıaracter. The way in which comfort stole into Sally's eart, was in the gradually-formed resolution that she ould never leave him nor forsake him, but serve him ithfully all her life long; and she had kept to her ord. She loved Miss Benson, but she almost worıipped the brother. The reverence for him was in er heart, however, and did not always show itself in er manners. But if she scolded him herself, she alwed no *one else* that privilege. If Miss Benson *ffered from her brother*, and ventured to think his

sayings or doings might have been improved, Sal came down upon her like a thunder-clap.

"My goodness gracious, Master Thurstan, wh will you learn to leave off meddling with other foll business! Here, Ben! help me up with these trunks

The little narrow passage was cleared, and Mi Benson took Ruth into the sitting-room. There we only two sitting-rooms on the ground-floor, one behi the other. Out of the back room the kitchen opene and for this reason the back parlour was used as t family sitting-room; or else, being, with its gard aspect, so much the pleasanter of the two, both Sal and Miss Benson would have appropriated it for M Benson's study. As it was, the front room, whi looked to the street, was his room; and many a pe son coming for help — help of which giving mon was the lowest kind — was admitted, and let forth Mr. Benson, unknown to any one else in the hou To make amends for his having the least cheer room on the ground-floor, he had the garden bedroo while his sister slept over his study. There were tv more rooms again over these, with sloping ceilin though otherwise large and airy. The attic looki into the garden was the spare bedroom; while t front belonged to Sally. There was no room over t kitchen, which was, in fact, a supplement to the hou The sitting-room was called by the pretty, old-fashion name of the parlour, while Mr. Benson's room w styled the study.

The curtains were drawn in the parlour; there w a bright fire and a clean hearth; indeed, exquis *cleanliness* seemed the very spirit of the household *for the door* which was open to the kitchen showe

delicately-white and spotless floor, and bright glittering tins, on which the ruddy fire-light danced.

From the place in which Ruth sat she could see all Sally's movements; and though she was not conscious of close or minute observation at the time (her body being weary, and her mind full of other thoughts), yet it was curious how faithfully that scene remained depicted on her memory in after years. The warm light filled every corner of the kitchen, in strong distinction to the faint illumination of the one candle in the parlour, whose radiance was confined, and was lost in the dead folds of window-curtains, carpet, and furniture. The square stout, bustling figure, neat and clean in every respect, but dressed in the peculiar, old-fashioned costume of the county, namely, a dark-striped linsey-woolsey petticoat, made very short, displaying sturdy legs in woollen stockings beneath; a loose kind of jacket called there a "bedgown," made of pink print; a snow-white apron and cap, both of linen, and the latter made in the shape of a "mutch;" — these articles completed Sally's costume, and were painted on Ruth's memory. Whilst Sally was busied in preparing tea, Miss Benson took off Ruth's things; and the latter instinctively felt that Sally, in the midst of her movements, was watching their proceedings. Occasionally she also put in a word in the conversation, and these little sentences were uttered quite in the tone of an equal, if not of a superior. She had dropped the more formal "you," with which at first she had addressed Miss Benson, and thou'd her quietly and habitually.

All *these particulars* sank unconsciously into Ruth's *mind; but they did* not rise to the surface, and become

perceptible, for a length of time. She was weary, much depressed. Even the very kindness that minist to her was overpowering. But over the dark, n moor a little light shone, — a beacon; and on she fixed her eyes, and struggled out of her pre deep dejection — the little child that was comin her!

Mr. Benson was as languid and weary as R and was silent during all this bustle and prepara His silence was more grateful to Ruth than Miss I son's many words, although she felt their kindı After tea, Miss Benson took her up-stairs to room. The white dimity bed, and the walls, sta green, had something of the colouring and purit effect of a snowdrop; while the floor, rubbed wi mixture that turned it into a rich dark-brown, gested the idea of the garden-mould out of which snowdrop grows. As Miss Benson helped the Ruth to undress, her voice became less full-toned hurried; the hush of approaching night subdued into a softened, solemn kind of tenderness, and murmured blessing sounded like granted prayer.

When Miss Benson came down-stairs, she fc her brother reading some letters which had been ceived during his absence. She went and softly the door of communication between the parlour the kitchen; and then, fetching a grey worsted stoc which she was knitting, sat down near him, her not looking at her work but fixed on the fire; w the eternal rapid click of the knitting-needles b the silence of the room, with a sound as monotor *and incessant* as the noise of a hand-loom. She *pected him* to speak, but he did not. She enjoy

examination into, and discussion of, her feelings; it was an interest and amusement to her, while he dreaded and avoided all such conversation. There were times when his feelings, which were always earnest, and sometimes morbid, burst forth, and defied control, and overwhelmed him; when a force was upon him compelling him to speak. But he, in general, strove to preserve his composure, from a fear of the compelling pain of such times, and the consequent exhaustion. His heart had been very full of Ruth all day long, and he was afraid of his sister beginning the subject; so he read on, or seemed to do so, though he hardly saw the letter he held before him. It was a great relief to him when Sally threw open the middle door with a bang, which did not indicate either calmness of mind or sweetness of temper.

"Is yon young woman going to stay any length o' time with us?" asked she of Miss Benson.

Mr. Benson put his hand gently on his sister's arm, to check her from making any reply, while he said,

"We cannot exactly tell, Sally. She will remain until after her confinement."

"Lord bless us and save us! — a baby in the house! Nay, then my time 's come, and I 'll pack up and begone. I never could abide them things. I 'd sooner have rats in the house."

Sally really did look alarmed.

"Why, Sally!" said Mr. Benson, smiling, "I was not much more than a baby when you came to take care of me."

"Yes, you were, Master Thurstan; you were a fine bouncing lad of three year old and better."

Then she remembered the change she had wrought.

in the "fine bouncing lad," and her eyes filled with tears, which she was too proud to wipe away with her apron; for, as she sometimes said to herself, "she could not abide crying before folk."

"Well, it's no use talking, Sally," said Miss Benson, too anxious to speak to be any longer repressed. "We've promised to keep her, and we must do it; you'll have none of the trouble, Sally, so don't be afraid."

"Well, I never! as if I minded trouble! You might ha' known me better nor that. I've scoured master's room twice over, just to make the boards look white, though the carpet is to cover them, and now you go and cast up about me minding my trouble. If them's the fashions you've learnt in Wales, I'm thankful I've never been there."

Sally looked red, indignant, and really hurt. Mr. Benson came in with his musical voice and soft words of healing.

"Faith knows you don't care for trouble, Sally; she is only anxious about this poor young woman, who has no friends but ourselves. We know there will be more trouble in consequence of her coming to stay with us; and I think, though we never spoke about it, that in making our plans we reckoned on your kind help, Sally, which has never failed us yet when we needed it."

"You've twice the sense of your sister, Master Thurstan, that you have. Boys always has. It's truth there will be more trouble, and I shall have my share on't, I reckon. I can face it if I'm told out and out, but I cannot abide the way some folk has of *denying* there's trouble or pain to be met; just as if *their saying* there was none, would do away with it

Some folk treats one like a babby, and I don't like it. I'm not meaning *you*, Master Thurstan."

"No, Sally, you need not say that. I know well enough who you mean when you say 'some folk.' However, I admit I was wrong in speaking as if you minded trouble, for there never was a creature minded it less. But I want you to like Mrs. Denbigh," said Miss Benson.

"I dare say I should, if you'd let me alone. I did na like her sitting down in master's chair. Set her up, indeed, in an arm-chair wi' cushions! Wenches in my day were glad enough of stools."

"She was tired to-night," said Mr. Benson. "We are all tired; so if you have done your work, Sally, come in to reading."

The three quiet people knelt down side by side, and two of them prayed earnestly for "them that had gone astray." Before ten o'clock, the household were in bed.

Ruth, sleepless, weary, restless with the oppression of a sorrow which she dared not face and contemplate bravely, kept awake all the early part of the night. Many a time did she rise, and go to the long casement window, and look abroad over the still and quiet town — over the grey-stone walls, and chimneys, and old high-pointed roofs — on to the far-away hilly line of the horizon, lying calm under the bright moonshine. It was late in the morning when she woke from her long-deferred slumbers; and when she went downstairs, she found Mr. and Miss Benson awaiting her in the parlour. That homely, pretty, old-fashioned little room! *How* bright and still and clean it looked! *The window (all* the windows at the back of the house

were casements) was open, to let in the sweet morn ing air, and streaming eastern sunshine. The lon jessamine sprays, with their white-scented stars, force themselves almost into the room. The little squa garden beyond, with grey-stone walls all round, wi rich and mellow in its autumnal colouring, runnir from deep crimson hollyhocks up to amber and go nasturtiums, and all toned down by the clear and d licate air. It was so still, that the gossamer-web laden with dew, did not tremble or quiver in the leas but the sun was drawing to himself the sweet incen of many flowers, and the parlour was scented wi the odours of mignionette and stocks. Miss Bens was arranging a bunch of China and damask roses an old-fashioned jar; they lay, all dewy and fresh, the white breakfast-cloth when Ruth entered. M Benson was reading in some large folio. With gent morning speech they greeted her; but the quiet repo of the scene was instantly broken by Sally popping from the kitchen, and glancing at Ruth with sha reproach. She said:

"I reckon I may bring in breakfast, now?" with strong emphasis on the last word.

"I am afraid I am very late," said Ruth.

"Oh, never mind," said Mr. Benson, gently. " was our fault for not telling you our breakfast hou We always have prayers at half-past seven; and, f Sally's sake, we never vary from that time: for s can so arrange her work, if she knows the hour prayers, as to have her mind calm and untroubled."

"*Ahem!*" said Miss Benson, rather inclined "*testify*" against the invariable calmness of Sall

mind at any hour of the day; but her brother went on as if he did not hear her.

"But the breakfast does not signify being delayed a little; and I am sure you were sadly tired with your long day yesterday."

Sally came slapping in, and put down some withered, tough, dry toast, with —

"It's not my doing if it is like leather;" but as no one appeared to hear her, she withdrew to her kitchen, leaving Ruth's cheeks like crimson at the annoyance she had caused.

All day long she had that feeling common to those who go to stay at a fresh house among comparative strangers: a feeling of the necessity that she should become accustomed to the new atmosphere in which she was placed before she could move and act freely; it was, indeed, a purer ether, a diviner air, which she was breathing in now to what she had been accustomed for long months. The gentle, blessed mother who had made her childhood's home holy ground, was in her very nature so far removed from any of earth's stains and temptations, that she seemed truly one of those

> "Who ask not if Thine eye
> Be on them, who, is love and truth,
> Where no misgiving is, rely.
> Upon the genial sense of youth."

In the Benson's house there was the same unconsciousness of individual merit, the same absence of introspection and analysis of motive, as there had been in her mother; but it seemed that their lives were pure and good not merely from a lovely and beautiful nature, but from some law, the obedience to which was, of itself, harmonious peace, and which governed them *almost implicitly*, and with as little questioning

on their part, as the glorious stars which haste not, neither rest not in their eternal obedience. This household had many failings: they were but human, and with all their loving desire to bring their lives into harmony with the will of God, they often erred and fell short; but somehow the very errors and faults of one individual seemed to call out higher excellencies in another, and so they re-acted upon each other, and the result of short discords was exceeding harmony and peace. But they had themselves no idea of the real state of things; they did not trouble themselves with marking their progress by self-examination; if Mr. Benson did sometimes, in hours of sick incapacity for exertion, turn inwards, it was to cry aloud with almost morbid despair, "God be merciful to me a sinner." But he strove to leave his life in the hands of God, and to forget himself.

Ruth sat still and quiet through the long first day. She was languid and weary from her journey; she was uncertain what help she might offer to give in the household duties, and what she might not. And in her langour and in her uncertainty it was pleasant to watch the new ways of the people among whom she was placed. After breakfast Mr. Benson withdrew to his study, Miss Benson took away the cups and saucers, and leaving the kitchen-door open, talked sometimes to Ruth, sometimes to Sally, while she washed them up. Sally had upstairs duties to perform, for which Ruth was thankful, as she kept receiving rather angry glances for her unpunctuality as long as Sally remained down-stairs. Miss Benson assisted in the preparation for the early dinner, and brought some *kidney-beans* to shred into a basin of bright, pure

pring-water, which caught and danced in the sun-
eams as she sat near the open casement of the par-
our, talking to Ruth of things and people which as
et the latter did not understand, and could not ar-
ange and comprehend. She was like a child who
ets a few pieces of a dissected map, and is confused
ntil a glimpse of the whole unity is shown him. Mr.
nd Mrs. Bradshaw were the centre pieces in Ruth's
map; their children, their servants, were the acces-
sories; and one or two other names were occasionally
mentioned. Ruth wondered and almost wearied at
Miss Benson's perseverance in talking to her about
people whom she did not know; but, in truth, Miss
Benson heard the long-drawn, quivering sighs which
came from the poor heavy heart when it was left to
silence, and had leisure to review the past; and her
quick accustomed ear caught also the low mutterings
of the thunder in the distance, in the shape of Sally's
soliloquies, which, like the asides at a theatre, were
intended to be heard. Suddenly, Miss Benson called
Ruth out of the room up-stairs into her own bed-
chamber, and then began rummaging in little old-
fashioned boxes, drawn out of an equally old-fashioned
bureau, half desk, half table, and wholly drawers.

"My dear, I've been very stupid and thoughtless.
Oh! I'm so glad I thought of it before Mrs. Bradshaw
came to call. Here it is!" and she pulled out an old
wedding-ring, and hurried it on Ruth's finger. Ruth
hung down her head, and reddened deep with shame;
her eyes smarted with the hot tears that filled them.
Miss Benson talked on in a nervous hurried way:

"It was my grandmother's; it's very broad; they made
them so then, to hold a posy inside: there's one in that.

'Thine own sweetheart
Till death doth part,'

I think it is. There, there! Run away, and l
you'd always worn it."

Ruth went up to her room, and threw hers
on her knees by the bed-side, and cried as if l
would break; and then, as if a light had co
into her soul, she calmed herself and praye
words can tell how humbly and with what
feeling. When she came down she was tea
and wretchedly pale; but even Sally looke
with new eyes, because of the dignity with w
was invested by an earnestness of purpose w
her child for its object. She sat and thought,
no longer heaved those bitter sighs which ha
Miss Benson's heart in the morning. In this
day wore on; early dinner, early tea, seemed
it preternaturally long to Ruth; the only e
some unexplained absence of Sally's, who ha
peared out of the house in the evening, much
Benson's surprise, and somewhat to her indig

At night, after Ruth had gone up to h
this absence was explained to her at least.
let down her long waving glossy hair, and wa
ing absorbed in thought in the middle of th
when she heard a round clumping knock at l
different from that given by the small knuckl
licate fingers, and in walked Sally, with a ju
severity of demeanour, holding in her hand
dow's caps of commonest make and coarsest
Queen Ellinor herself, when she presented the
Fair Rosamond, had not a more relentless
stamped on her demeanour than had Sall

noment. She walked up to the beautiful, astonished Ruth, where she stood in her long, soft, white dressing-gown, with all her luxuriant brown hair hanging dishevelled down her figure, and thus Sally spoke:

"Missus — or miss, as the case may be — I've my doubts as to you. I'm not going to have my master and Miss Faith put upon, or shame come near them. Widows wears these sorts of caps, and has their hair cut off; and whether widows wears wedding-rings or not, they shall have their hair cut off — they shall. I'll have no half work in this house. I've lived with the family forty-nine year come Michaelmas, and I'll not see it disgraced by any one's fine long curls. Sit down and let me snip off your hair, and let me see you sham decently in a widow's cap tomorrow, or I'll leave the house. Whatten's come over Miss Faith, as used to be as nice a lady as ever was, to be taken by such as you, I dunnot know. Here! sit down with ye, and let me crop you."

She laid no light hand on Ruth's shoulder; and the latter, partly intimidated by the old servant, who had hitherto only turned her vixen lining to observation, and partly because she was broken-spirited enough to be indifferent to the measure proposed, quietly sat down. Sally produced the formidable pair of scissors that always hung at her side, and began to cut in a merciless manner. She expected some remonstrance or some opposition, and had a torrent of words ready to flow forth at the least sign of rebellion; but Ruth was still and silent, with meekly-bowed head, under the strange hands that were shearing her beautiful hair *into the clipped* shortness of a boy's. Long be*ore she had finish*ed, Sally had some slight misgivings

as to the fancied necessity of her task; but it was t
late, for half the curls were gone, and the rest m
now come off. When she had done, she lifted
Ruth's face by placing her hand under the round wh
chin. She gazed into the countenance, expecting
read some anger there, although it had not come
in words; but she only met the large, quiet eyes th
looked at her with sad gentleness out of their fine
hollowed orbits. Ruth's soft, yet dignified submissi
touched Sally with compunction, although she did n
choose to show the change in her feelings. She tr
to hide it, indeed, by stooping to pick up the lo
bright tresses; and holding them up admiringly, a
letting them drop down and float on the air (like t
pendant branches of the weeping birch), she said:
thought we should have had some crying — I d
They're pretty curls enough; you've not been so b
to let them be cut off neither. You see Master Th
stan is no wiser than a baby in some things; and M
Faith just lets him have his own way; so it's all l
to me to keep him out of scrapes. I'll wish you
very good night. I've heard many a one say as lo
hair was not wholesome. Good night."

But in a minute she popped her head into Rut
room once more.

"You'll put on them caps to-morrow morni
I'll make you a present on them."

Sally had carried away the beautiful curls, and s
could not find it in her heart to throw such lov
chestnut tresses away, and she folded them up ca
fully in paper, and placed them in a safe corner of l
drawer.

CHAPTER XIV.

RUTH felt very shy when she came down (at half-past seven) the next morning, in her widow's cap. Her smooth, pale face, with its oval untouched by time, looked more young and child-like than ever, when contrasted with the head-gear usually associated with ideas of age. She blushed very deeply as Mr. and Miss Benson showed the astonishment, which they could not conceal, in their looks. She said in a low voice to Miss Benson,

"Sally thought I had better wear it."

Miss Benson made no reply; but was startled at the intelligence, which she thought was conveyed in this speech, of Sally's acquaintance with Ruth's real situation. She noticed Sally's looks particularly this morning. The manner in which the old servant treated Ruth, had in it far more of respect than there had been the day before; but there was a kind of satisfied way of braving out Miss Benson's glances which made the latter uncertain and uncomfortable.

She followed her brother into his study.

"Do you know, Thurstan, I am almost certain Sally suspects."

Mr. Benson sighed. The deception grieved him, and yet he thought he saw its necessity.

"What makes you think so?" asked he.

"Oh! *many little* things. It was her odd way of *nicking her head* about, as if to catch a good view of

Ruth's left hand, that made me think of the wedding ring; and once, yesterday, when I thought I had mad up quite a natural speech, and was saying how sad i was for so young a creature to be left a widow, sh broke in with 'widow be farred!' in a very strange contemptuous kind of manner."

"If she suspects, we had far better tell her th truth, at once. She will never rest till she finds it out so we must make a virtue of necessity."

"Well, brother, you shall tell her then, for I an sure I daren't. I don't mind doing the thing, since yo talked to me that day, and since I've got to know Ruth; but I do mind all the clatter people will mak about it."

"But Sally is not 'people.'"

"Oh, I see it must be done; she'll talk as much a all the other persons put together, so that's the reaso I call her 'people.' Shall I call her?" (For the hous was too homely and primitive to have bells.)

Sally came, fully aware of what was now going t be told her, and determined not to help them out i telling their awkward secret, by understanding the na ture of it before it was put into the plainest language In every pause, when they hoped she had caught th meaning they were hinting at, she persisted in lookin stupid and perplexed, and in saying "Well," as if quit unenlightened as to the end of the story. When it wa all complete and plain before her, she said, honestl enough,

"It's just as I thought it was; and I think yo may thank me for having had the sense to put her int widow's caps, and clip off that bonny brown hair tha was fitter for a bride in lawful matrimony than for suc

as her. She took it very well, though. She was as quiet as a lamb. and I clipped her pretty roughly at first. I must say, though, if I 'd ha' known who your visitor was, I 'd ha' packed up my things and cleared myself out of the house before such as her came into it. As it 's done, I suppose I must stand by you, and help you through with it; I only hope I sha'n't lose my character, — and me a parish clerk's daughter."

"Oh, Sally! people know you too well to think any ill of you," said Miss Benson, who was pleased to find the difficulty so easily got over; for, in truth, Sally had been much softened by the unresisting gentleness with which Ruth had submitted to the "clipping" of the night before.

"If I 'd been with you, Master Thurstan, I 'd ha' seen sharp after you, for you 're always picking up some one or another as nobody else would touch with a pair of tongs. Why, there was that Nelly Brandon's child as was left at our door, if I hadn't gone to th' overseer we should have had that Irish tramp's babby saddled on us for life; but I went off and told th' overseer, and th' mother was caught."

"Yes!" said Mr. Benson, sadly, "and I often lie awake and wonder what is the fate of that poor little thing, forced back on the mother who tried to get quit of it. I often doubt whether I did right; but it 's no use thinking about it now."

"I 'm thankful it isn't," said Sally; "and now, if we 've talked doctrine long enough, I 'll go make th' beds. Yon girl's secret is safe enough for me."

Saying this she left the room, and Miss Benson followed. She found Ruth busy washing the breakfast-things; and they were done in so quiet and orderly a

manner, that neither Miss Benson nor Sally, both particular enough, had any of their little fancies or prejudices annoyed. She seemed to have an instinctive knowledge of the exact period when her help was likely to become a hindrance, and withdrew from the busy kitchen just at the right time.

That afternoon, as Miss Benson and Ruth sat at their work, Mrs. and Miss Bradshaw called. Miss Benson was so nervous as to surprise Ruth, who did not understand the probable and possible questions which might be asked respecting any visitor at the minister's house. Ruth went on sewing, absorbed in her own thoughts, and glad that the conversation between the two elder ladies and the silence of the younger one, who sat at some distance from her, gave her an opportunity of retreating into the haunts of memory; and soon the work fell from her hands, and her eyes were fixed on the little garden beyond, but she did not see its flowers or its walls; she saw the mountains which girdled Llan-dhu, and saw the sun rise from behind their iron outline, just as it had done — how long ago? was it months or was it years? — since she had watched the night through, crouched up at *his* door. Which was the dream and which the reality? that distant life, or this? His moans rang more clearly in her ears than the buzzing of the conversation between Mrs. Bradshaw and Miss Benson.

At length the subdued, scared-looking little lady and her bright-eyed silent daughter rose to take leave; Ruth started into the present, and stood up and curtseyed, and turned sick at heart with sudden *recollection.*

Miss Benson accompanied Mrs. Bradshaw to the

door; and in the passage gave her a long explanation of Ruth's (fictitious) history. Mrs. Bradshaw looked so much interested and pleased, that Miss Benson enlarged a little more than was necessary, and rounded off her invention with one or two imaginary details, which, she was quite unconscious, were overheard by her brother through the half-open study door.

She was rather dismayed when he called her into his room after Mrs. Bradshaw's departure, and asked her what she had been saying about Ruth?

"Oh! I thought it was better to explain it thoroughly —I mean, to tell the story we wished to have believed once for all — you know we agreed about that, Thurstan?" deprecatingly.

"Yes; but I heard you saying you believed her husband had been a young surgeon, did I not?"

"Well, Thurstan, you know he must have been something; and young surgeons are so in the way of dying, it seemed very natural. Besides," said she, with sudden boldness, "I do think I 've a talent for fiction, it is so pleasant to invent, and make the incidents dovetail together; and after all, if we are to tell a lie, we may as well do it thoroughly, or else it 's of no use. A bungling lie would be worse than useless. And, Thurstan — it may be very wrong — but I believe — I am afraid I enjoy not being fettered by truth. Don't look so grave. You know it is necessary, if ever it was, to tell falsehoods now; and don't be angry with me because I do it well.

He was shading his eyes with his hand, and did not speak for some time. At last he said:

"If it *were not for* the child, I would tell all; but *the world is so cruel.* You don't know how this ap-

parent necessity for falsehood pains me, Faith, or you would not invent all these details, which are so many additional lies."

"Well, well! I will restrain myself if I have to tell about Ruth again. But Mrs. Bradshaw will tell every one who need to know. You don't wish me to contradict it, Thurstan, surely — it was such a pretty probable story."

"Faith! I hope God will forgive us if we are doing wrong; and pray, dear, don't add one unnecessary word that is not true."

Another day elapsed, and then it was Sunday; and the house seemed filled with a deep peace. Even Sally's movements were less hasty and abrupt. Mr. Benson seemed invested with a new dignity, which made his bodily deformity be forgotten in his calm grave composure of spirit. Every trace of week-day occupation was put away; the night before, a bright new handsome tablecloth had been smoothed down over the table, and the jars had been freshly filled with flowers. Sunday was a festival and a holyday in the house. After the very early breakfast, little feet pattered into Mr. Benson's study, for he had a class for boys — a sort of domestic Sunday-school, only that there was more talking between teacher and pupil than dry, absolute lessons going on. Miss Benson too, had her little, neat-tippeted maidens sitting with her in the parlour; and she was far more particular in keeping them to their reading and spelling, than her brother was with his boys. Sally, too, put in her word of instruction from the kitchen, helping, as she *fancied*, though her assistance was often rather *mal apropos;* for instance, she called out, to a little

stupid, roly-poly girl, to whom Miss Benson was busy explaining the meaning of the word quadruped.

"Quadruped, a thing wi' four legs, Jenny; a chair is a quadruped, child!"

But Miss Benson had a deaf manner sometimes when her patience was not too severely tried, and she put it on now. Ruth sat on a low hassock, and coaxed the least of the little creatures to her, and showed it pictures till it fell asleep in her arms, and sent a thrill through her, at the thought of the tiny darling who would lie on her breast before long, and whom she would have to cherish and to shelter from the storms of the world.

And then she remembered, that she was once white and sinless as the wee lassie who lay in her arms; and she knew that she had gone astray. By-and-by the children trooped away, and Miss Benson summoned her to put on her things for chapel.

The chapel was up a narrow street, or rather *cul-de-sac*, close by. It stood on the outskirts of the town, almost in fields. It was built about the time of Matthew and Philip Henry, when the Dissenters were afraid of attracting attention or observation, and hid their places of worship in obscure and out-of-the-way parts of the towns in which they were built. Accordingly, it often happened, as in the present case, that the buildings immediately surrounding, as well as the chapels themselves, looked as if they carried you back to a period a hundred and fifty years ago. The chapel had a picturesque and old-world look, for luckily the congregation had been too poor to rebuild it, or new face it in George the Third's time. The staircases which led to the galleries were outside, at

each end of the building, and the irregular roof an worn stone-steps looked grey and stained by time an weather. The grassy hillocks, each with a little up right head-stone, were shaded by a grand old wych elm. A lilac-bush or two, a white rose-tree, and a few laburnums, all old and gnarled enough, were planted round the chapel yard; and the casemen windows of the chapel were made of heavy-leaded diamond-shaped panes, almost covered with ivy, pro ducing a green gloom, not without its solemnity within. This ivy was the home of an infinite numbe of little birds, which twittered and warbled, till i might have been thought that they were emulous o the power of praise possessed by the human creature within, with such earnest, long-drawn strains did thi crowd of winged songsters rejoice and be glad in thei beautiful gift of life. The interior of the building wa plain and simple as plain and simple could be. Whe it was fitted up, oak-timber was much cheaper than i is now, so the wood-work was all of that description but roughly hewed, for the early builders had no much wealth to spare. The walls were whitewashed and were recipients of the shadows of the beauty without; on their "white plains" the tracery of th ivy might be seen, now still, now stirred by the sudde flight of some little bird. The congregation consiste of here and there a farmer with his labourers, wh came down from the uplands beyond the town to wor ship where their fathers worshipped, and who love the place because they knew how much those fathe had suffered for it, although they never troubled then selves with the reason why they left the parish churc of a few shopkeepers, far more thoughtful and reason

ing, who were Dissenters from conviction, unmixed with old ancestral association; and of one or two families of still higher worldly station. With many poor, who were drawn there by love for Mr. Benson's character, and by a feeling that the faith which made him what he was could not be far wrong, for the base of the pyramid, and with Mr. Bradshaw for its apex, the congregation stood complete.

The country people came in sleeking down their hair, and treading with earnest attempts at noiseless lightness of step over the floor of the aisle; and by-and-by, when all were assembled, Mr. Benson followed, unmarshalled and unattended. When he had closed the pulpit-door, and knelt in prayer for an instant or two, he gave out a psalm from the dear old Scottish paraphrase, with its primitive inversion of the simple perfect Bible words; and a kind of precentor stood up, and, having sounded the note on a pitch-pipe, sang a couple of lines by way of indicating the tune; then all the congregation stood up, and sang aloud, Mr. Bradshaw's great bass voice being half a note in advance of the others, in accordance with his place of precedence as principal member of the congregation. His powerful voice was like an organ very badly played, and very much out of tune; but as he had no ear, and no diffidence, it pleased him very much to hear the fine loud sound. He was a tall, large-boned, iron man; stern, powerful, and authoritative in appearance; dressed in clothes of the finest broad-cloth, and scrupulously ill-made, as if to show that he was indifferent to all outward things. His wife was sweet and gentle-looking, but as if she was thoroughly broken into *submission.*

Ruth did not see this, or hear aught but the words which were reverently — oh, how reverently! — spoken by Mr. Benson. He had had Ruth present in his thoughts all the time he had been preparing for his Sunday duty; and he had tried carefully to eschew everything which she might feel as an allusion to her own case. He remembered how the Good Shepherd, in Poussin's beautiful picture, tenderly carried the lambs which had wearied themselves by going astray, and felt how like tenderness was required towards poor Ruth. But where is the chapter which does not contain something which a broken and contrite spirit may not apply to itself? And so it fell out that, as he read, Ruth's heart was smitten, and she sank down, and down, till she was kneeling on the floor of the pew, and speaking to God in the spirit, if not in the words of the Prodigal Son: "Father! I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy child!" Miss Benson was thankful (although she loved Ruth the better for this self-abandonment) that the minister's seat was far in the shade of the gallery. She tried to look most attentive to her brother, in order that Mr. Bradshaw might not suspect anything unusual, while she stealthily took hold of Ruth's passive hand, as it lay helpless on the cushion, and pressed it softly and tenderly. But Ruth sat on the ground, bowed down and crushed in her sorrow, till all was ended.

Miss Benson loitered in her seat, divided betwee the consciousness that she, as *locum tenens* for th minister's wife, was expected to be at the door t receive the kind greetings of many after her absenc *from home*, and her unwillingness to disturb Ruth

who was evidently praying, and, by her quiet breathing, receiving grave and solemn influences into her soul. At length she rose up, calm and composed even to dignity. The chapel was still and empty; but Miss Benson heard the buzz of voices in the chapel-yard without. Thy were probably those of people waiting for her; and she summoned courage, and taking Ruth's arm in hers, and holding her hand affectionately, they went out into the broad daylight. As they issued forth, Miss Benson heard Mr. Bradshaw's strong bass voice speaking to her brother, and winced, as she knew he would be wincing, under the broad praise, which is impertinence, however little it may be intended or esteemed as such.

"Oh, yes! — my wife told me yesterday about her — her husband was a surgeon; my father was a surgeon too, as I think you have heard. Very much to your credit, I must say, Mr. Benson, with your limited means, to burden yourself with a poor relation. Very creditable indeed."

Miss Benson glanced at Ruth; she either did not hear or did not understand, but passed on into the awful sphere of Mr. Bradshaw's observation unmoved. He was in a bland and condescending humour of universal approval, and when he saw Ruth, he nodded his head in token of satisfaction. That ordeal was over, Miss Benson thought, and in the thought rejoiced.

"After dinner, you must go and lie down, my dear," said she, untying Ruth's bonnet-strings, and kissing her. "Sally goes to church again, but you won't mind staying alone in the house. I am sorry we *have so many* people to dinner, but my brother

will always have enough on Sundays for any old weak people, who may have come from a distance to stay and dine with us; and to-day they all seem to have come, because it is his first Sabbath home."

In this way Ruth's first Sunday passed over.

CHAPTER XV.

"HERE is a parcel for you, Ruth!" said Miss Benson on the Tuesday morning.

"For me!" said Ruth, all sorts of rushing thoughts and hopes filling her mind, and turning her dizzy with expectation. If it had been from "him," the new-born resolutions would have had a hard struggle for existence.

"It is directed 'Mrs. Denbigh,'" said Miss Benson, before giving it up. "It is in Mrs. Bradshaw's handwriting;" and, far more curious than Ruth, she awaited the untying of the close-knotted string. When the paper was opened, it displayed a whole piece of delicate cambric-muslin; and there was a short note from Mrs. Bradshaw to Ruth, saying her husband had wished her to send this muslin in aid of any preparations Mrs. Denbigh might have to make. Ruth said nothing, but coloured up, and sat down again to her employment.

"Very fine muslin, indeed," said Miss Benson, feeling it, and holding it up against the light, with the air of a connoisseur; yet all the time she was glancing at Ruth's grave face. The latter kept silence, and showed no wish to inspect her present further. At last she said, in a low voice,

"I suppose I *may* send it back again?"

"My dear child! send it back to Mr. Bradshaw!

You'd offend him for life. You may depend upon it, he means it as a mark of high favour!"

"What right had he to send it me?" asked Ruth, still in her quiet voice.

"What right? Mr. Bradshaw thinks — I don't know exactly what you mean by 'right.'"

Ruth was silent for a moment, and then said:

"There are people to whom I love to feel that I owe gratitude — gratitude which I cannot express, and had better not talk about — but I cannot see why a person whom I do not know should lay me under an obligation. Oh! don't say I must take this muslin, please, Miss Benson!"

What Miss Benson might have said if her brother had not just then entered the room, neither he nor any other person could tell; but she felt his presence was most opportune, and called him in as umpire. He had come hastily, for he had much to do; but he no sooner heard the case than he sat down, and tried to draw some more explicit declaration of her feeling from Ruth, who had remained silent during Miss Benson's explanation.

"You would rather send this present back?" said he.

"Yes," she answered, softly. "Is it wrong?"

"Why do you want to return it?"

"Because I feel as if Mr. Bradshaw had no right to offer it me."

Mr. Benson was silent.

"It's beautifully fine," said Miss Benson, still examining the piece.

"You think that it is a right which must be *earned?*"

"Yes," said she, after a minute's pause. "Don't you?"

"I understand what you mean. It is a delight to have gifts made to you by those whom you esteem and love, because then such gifts are merely to be considered as fringes to the garment — as inconsiderable additions to the mighty treasure of their affection, adding a grace, but no additional value, to what before was precious, and proceeding as naturally out of that as leaves burgeon out upon the trees; but you feel it to be different when there is no regard for the giver to idealise the gift — when it simply takes its stand among your property as so much money's value. Is this it, Ruth?"

"I think it is. I never reasoned why I felt as I did; I only knew that Mr. Bradshaw's giving me a present hurt me, instead of making me glad."

"Well, but there is another side of the case we have not looked at yet — we must think of that, too. You know who said 'Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you?' Mr Bradshaw may not have had that in his mind when he desired his wife to send you this; he may have been self-seeking, and only anxious to gratify his love of patronising — that is the worst motive we can give him; and that would be no excuse for your thinking only of yourself, and returning his present."

"But you would not have me pretend to be obliged?" asked Ruth

"No, I would not. I have often been similarly situated to you, *Ruth*; Mr. Bradshaw has frequently opposed me on the points on which I feel the warmest — *am the most* earnestly convinced. He, no doubt,

thinks me Quixotic, and often speaks of me, and to me, with great contempt when he is angry. I suppose he has a little fit of penitence afterwards, or perhaps he thinks he can pay for ungracious speeches by a present; so, formerly, he invariably sent me something after these occasions. It was a time, of all others, to feel as you are doing now; but I became convinced it would be right to accept them, giving only the very cool thanks which I felt. This omission of all show of much gratitude had the best effect — the presents have much diminished; but if the gifts have lessened, the unjustifiable speeches have decreased in still greater proportion, and I am sure we respect each other more. Take this muslin, Ruth, for the reason I named; and thank him as your feelings prompt you. Overstrained expressions of gratitude always seem like an endeavour to place the receiver of these expressions in the position of debtor for future favours. But you won't fall into this error."

Ruth listened to Mr. Benson; but she had not yet fallen sufficiently into the tone of his mind to understand him fully. She only felt that he comprehended her better than Miss Benson, who once more tried to reconcile her to her present, by calling her attention to the length and breadth thereof.

"I will do what you wish me," she said, after a little pause of thoughtfulness. "May we talk of something else?"

Mr. Benson saw that his sister's frame of mind was not particularly congenial with Ruth's, any more *than Ruth's* was with Miss Benson's; and, putting *aside all thought* of returning to the business which

had appeared to him so important when he came into the room (but which principally related to himself), he remained above an hour in the parlour, interesting them on subjects far removed from the present, and left them at the end of that time soothed and calm.

But the present gave a new current to Ruth's ideas. Her heart was as yet too sore to speak, but her mind was crowded with plans. She asked Sally to buy her (with the money produced by the sale of a ring or two) the coarsest linen, the homeliest dark blue print, and similar materials; on which she set busily to work to make clothes for herself; and as they were made, she put them on; and as she put them on, she gave a grace to each, which such homely material and simple shaping had never had before. Then the fine linen and delicate soft white muslin, which she had chosen in preference to more expensive articles of dress when Mr. Bellingham had given her *carte blanche* in London, were cut into small garments, most daintily stitched and made ready for the little creature, for whom in its white purity of soul nothing could be too precious.

The love which dictated this extreme simplicity and coarseness of attire, was taken for stiff, hard economy by Mr. Bradshaw, when he deigned to observe it. And economy by itself, without any soul or spirit in it to make it living and holy, was a great merit in his eyes. Indeed, Ruth altogether found favour with him. Her quiet manner, subdued by an internal consciousness of a deeper cause for sorrow than he was aware of, he interpreted into a very proper and becoming awe of him. He looked off from his own *prayers to observe* how well she attended to hers at *chapel; when he* came to any verse in the hymn re-

lating to immortality or a future life, he sang it unusually loud, thinking he should thus comfort her in her sorrow for her deceased husband. He desired Mrs. Bradshaw to pay her every attention she could; and even once remarked, that he thought her so respectable a young person that he should not object to her being asked to tea the next time Mr. and Miss Benson came. He added, that he thought, indeed, Benson had looked last Sunday as if he rather hoped to get an invitation; and it was right to encourage the ministers, and to show them respect, even though their salaries were small. The only thing against this Mrs. Denbigh was the circumstance of her having married too early, and without any provision for a family. Though Ruth pleaded delicacy of health, and declined accompanying Mr. and Miss Benson on their visit to Mr. Bradshaw, she still preserved her place in his esteem; and Miss Benson had to call a little upon her "talent for fiction" to spare Ruth from the infliction of further presents, in making which his love of patronising delighted.

The yellow and crimson leaves came floating down on the still October air; November followed, bleak and dreary; it was more cheerful when the earth put on her beautiful robe of white, which covered up all the grey naked stems, and loaded the leaves of the hollies and evergreens each with its burden of feathery snow. When Ruth sank down to languor and sadness, Miss Benson trotted up-stairs, and rummaged up every article of spare or worn-out clothing, and bringing down a variety of strange materials, she tried to interest Ruth in making them up into garments for the poor. But though Ruth's fingers flew through the

ork, she still sighed with thought and remembrance. iss Benson was at first disappointed, and then she as angry. When she heard the low, long sigh, and aw the dreamy eyes filling with glittering tears, she ould say, "What is the matter, Ruth?" in a half-proachful tone, for the sight of suffering was painful her; she had done all in her power to remedy it; nd, though she acknowledged a cause beyond her each for Ruth's deep sorrow, and, in fact, loved and espected her all the more for these manifestations of rief, yet at the time they irritated her. Then Ruth ould snatch up the dropped work, and stitch away ith drooping eyes, from which the hot tears fell fast; nd Miss Benson was then angry with herself, yet not t all inclined to agree with Sally when she asked her istress "why she kept 'mithering' the poor lass with sking her for ever what was the matter, as if she did ot know well enough." Some element of harmony as wanting — some little angel of peace, in loving hom all hearts and natures should be drawn together, nd their discords hushed.

The earth was still "hiding her guilty front with nocent snow," when a little baby was laid by the ide of the pale white mother. It was a boy; before-and she had wished for a girl, as being less likely to eel the want of a father — as being what a mother, orse than widowed, could most effectually shelter. But now she did not think or remember this. What it as, she would not have exchanged for a wilderness f girls. It was her own, her darling, her individual aby, already, though not an hour old, separate and *ole in her heart, strangely* filling up its measure with *ve and peace, and* even hope. For here was a new,

pure, beautiful, innocent life, which she fondly imagined, in that early passion of maternal love, she could guard from every touch of corrupting sin by ever watchful and most tender care. And *her* mother had thought the same, most probably; and thousands and others think the same, and pray to God to purify and cleanse their souls, that they may be fit guardians for their little children. Oh, how Ruth prayed, even while she was yet too weak to speak; and how she felt the beauty and significance of the words, "O Father!"

She was roused from this holy abstraction by the sound of Miss Benson's voice. It was very much as if she had been crying.

"Look, Ruth!" it said, softly, "my brother sent you these. They are the first snowdrops in the garden." And she put them on the pillow by Ruth; the baby lay on the opposite side.

"Won't you look at him?" said Ruth; "he is pretty!"

Miss Benson had a strange reluctance to see him. To Ruth, in spite of all that had come and gone, she was reconciled — nay, more, she was deeply attached; but over the baby there hung a cloud of shame and disgrace. Poor little creature, her heart was closed against it — firmly, as she thought. But she could not resist Ruth's low faint voice, nor her pleading eyes, and she went round to peep at him as he lay in his mother's arm, as yet his shield and guard.

"Sally says he will have black hair, she thinks," said Ruth. "His little hand is quite a man's, already. *Just feel* how firmly he closes it;" and with her own *weak fingers* she opened his little red fist, and took

Miss Benson's reluctant hand, placed one of her fingers in his grasp. That baby-touch called out her love; the doors of her heart were thrown open wide for the little infant to go in and take possession.

"Ah, my darling!" said Ruth, falling back weak and weary. "If God will but spare you to me, never mother did more than I will. I have done you a grievous wrong — but, if I may but live, I will spend my life in serving you!"

"And in serving God!" said Miss Benson, with tears in her eyes. "You must not make him into an idol, or God will, perhaps, punish you through him."

A pang of affright shot through Ruth's heart at these words; had she already sinned and made her child into an idol, and was there punishment already in store for her through him? But then the internal voice whispered that God was "Our Father," and that He knew our frame, and knew how natural was the first outburst of a mother's love; so, although she treasured up the warning, she ceased to affright herself for what had already gushed forth.

"Now go to sleep, Ruth," said Miss Benson, kissing her, and darkening the room. But Ruth could not sleep; if her heavy eyes closed, she opened them again with a start, for sleep seemed to be an enemy stealing from her the consciousness of being a mother. That one thought excluded all remembrance and all anticipation, in those first hours of delight.

But soon remembrance and anticipation came. Then was the natural want of the person, who alone could take an interest similar in kind, though not in amount, *to the mother's.* And sadness grew like a giant *in the still watches* of the night, when she re-

membered that there would be no father to guide an strengthen the child, and place him in a favourab position for fighting the hard "Battle of Life." Sh hoped and believed that no one would know the s of his parents; and that that struggle might be spar to him. But a father's powerful care and migh guidance would never be his; and then, in those hou of spiritual purification, came the wonder and th doubt of how far the real father would be the one whom, with her desire of heaven for her child, wha ever might become of herself, she would wish to en trust him. Slight speeches, telling of a selfish, world nature, unnoticed at the time, came back upon h ear, having a new significance. They told of a lo standard, of impatient self-indulgence, of no acknow ledgment of things spiritual and heavenly. Even whi this examination was forced upon her, by the ne spirit of maternity that had entered into her, an made her child's welfare supreme, she hated and re proached herself for the necessity there seemed upo her of examining and judging the absent father of h child. And so the compelling presence that had take possession of her, wearied her into a kind of feveris slumber; in which she dreamt that the innocent bab that lay by her side in soft ruddy slumber, had starte up into man's growth, and, instead of the pure an noble being whom she had prayed to present as h child to "Our Father in heaven," he was a repetitio of his father; and, like him, lured some maiden (wh in her dream seemed strangely like herself, only mo utterly sad and desolate even than she) into sin, an *left her* there to even a worse fate than that of suicid *For Ruth* believed there was a worse. She dre

she saw the girl, wandering, lost; and that she saw her son in high places, prosperous — but with more than blood on his soul. She saw her son dragged down by the clinging girl into some pit of horrors into which she dared not look, but from whence his father's voice was heard, crying aloud, that in his day and generation he had not remembered the words of God, and that now he was "tormented in this flame." Then she started in sick terror, and saw, by the dim rushlight, Sally, nodding in an arm-chair by the fire; and felt her little soft warm babe, nestled up against her breast, rocked by her heart, which yet beat hard from the effects of the evil dream. She dared not go to sleep again, but prayed. And every time she prayed, she asked with a more complete wisdom, and a more utter and self-forgetting faith. Little child! thy angel was with God, and drew her nearer and nearer to Him, whose face is continually beheld by the angels of little children.

CHAPTER XVI.

SALLY and Miss Benson took it in turns to sit up, or rather, they took it in turns to nod by the fire; for if Ruth was awake she lay very still in the moonlight calm of her sick bed. That time resembled a beautiful August evening, such as I have seen. The white snowy rolling mist covers up under its great sheet all trees and meadows, and tokens of earth; but it cannot rise high enough to shut out the heavens, which on such nights seem bending very near, and to be the only real and present objects; and so near, so real and present, did heaven, and eternity, and God seem to Ruth, as she lay encircling her mysterious holy child.

One night Sally found out she was not asleep.

"I'm a rare hand at talking folks to sleep," said she. "I'll try on thee, for thou must get strength by sleeping and eating. What must I talk to thee about, I wonder. Shall I tell thee a love story or a fairy story, such as I've telled Master Thurstan many a time and many a time, for all his father set his face again fairies, and called it vain talking; or shall I tell you the dinner I once cooked, when Mr. Harding, as was Miss Faith's sweetheart, came unlooked for, and we'd nought in the house but a neck of mutton, out of which I made seven dishes, all with a different name?"

"*Who* was Mr. Harding?" asked Ruth.

"*Oh*, he was a grand gentleman from London, as

had seen Miss Faith, and been struck by her pretty looks when she was out on a visit, and came here to ask her to marry him. She said, 'No, she would never leave Master Thurstan, as could never marry;' but she pined a deal at after he went away. She kept up afore Master Thurstan, but I seed her fretting, though I never let on that I did, for I thought she'd soonest get over it and be thankful at after she'd the strength to do right. However, I've no business to be talking of Miss Benson's concerns. I'll tell you of my own sweethearts and welcome, or I'll tell you of the dinner, which was the grandest thing I ever did in my life, but I thought a Lunnoner should never think country folks knew nothing; and, my word! I puzzled him with his dinner. I'm doubting whether to this day he knows whether what he was eating was fish, flesh, or fowl. Shall I tell you how I managed?"

But Ruth said she would rather hear about Sally's sweethearts, much to the disappointment of the latter, who considered the dinner by far the greatest achievement.

"Well, you see, I don't know as I should call them sweethearts; for excepting John Rawson, who was shut up in a mad-house the next week, I never had what you may call a downright offer of marriage but once. But I had once; and so I may say I had a sweetheart. I was beginning to be afeared though, for one likes to be axed; that's but civility; and I remember, after I had turned forty, and afore Jeremiah Dixon had spoken, I began to think John Rawson had perhaps not been so very mad, and that I'd done ill to lightly his offer, as a madman's, if it was to be the *only one I was* ever to have; I don't mean as I'd

have had him, but I thought, if it was to come o'er again, I'd speak respectful of him to folk, and say it were only his way to go about on-all-fours, but that he was a sensible man in most things. However, I'd had my laugh, and so had others, at my crazy lover, and it was late now to set him up as a Solomon. However, I thought it would be no bad thing to be tried again; but I little thought the trial would come when it did. You see, Saturday night is a leisure night in counting-houses and such like places, while it's the busiest of all for servants. Well! it was a Saturday night, and I'd my baize apron on, and the tails of my bed-gown pinned together behind, down on my knees, pipeclaying the kitchen, when a knock comes to the back door. 'Come in!' says I; but it knocked again, as if it were too stately to open the door for itself; so I got up, rather cross, and opened the door; and there stood Jerry Dixon, Mr. Holt's head-clerk; only he was not head-clerk then. So I stood, stopping up the door, fancying he wanted to speak to master; but he kind of pushed past me, and telling me summut about the weather (as if I could not see it for myself), he took a chair, and sat down by the oven. 'Cool and easy!' thought I; meaning hisself, not his place, which I knew must be pretty hot. Well! it seemed no use standing waiting for my gentleman to go; not that he had much to say either; but he kept twirling his hat round and round, and smoothing the nap on't with the back of his hand So at last I squatted down to my work, and thinks I shall be on my knees all ready if he puts up a prayer, for I knew he was a Methodee by bring up, and had only lately turned to master's

thinking; and them Methodees are terrible hands at unexpected prayers when one least looks for 'em. I can't say I like their way of taking one by surprise, as it were; but then I'm a parish-clerk's daughter, and could never demean myself to dissenting fashions, always save and except Master Thurstan's, bless him. However, I'd been caught once or twice unawares, so this time I thought I'd be up to it, and I moved a dry duster wherever I went, to kneel upon in case he began when I were in a wet place. By-and-by I thought, if the man would pray it would be a blessing, for it would prevent his sending his eyes after me wherever I went; for when they takes to praying they shuts their eyes, and quivers th' lids in a queer kind o' way — them Dissenters does. I can speak pretty plain to you, for you're bred in the Church like mysel', and must find it as out o' the way as I do to be among dissenting folk. God forbid I should speak disrespectful of Master Thurstan and Miss Faith, though; I never think on them as Church or Dissenters, but just as Christians. But to come back to Jerry. First, I tried always to be cleaning at his back; but when he wheeled round, so as always to face me, I thought I'd try a different game. So, says I, 'Master Dixon, I ax your pardon, but I must pipeclay under your chair. Will you please to move?' Well, he moved; and by-and-by I was at him again with the same words; and at after that, again and again, till he were always moving about wi' his chair behind him, like a snail as carries its house on its back. And the great gaupus never seed that I were pipeclaying the same places twice over. At last I got *desperate cross*, he were so in my way; so I made

two big crosses on the tails of his brown coat; for y
see, wherever he went, up or down, he drew out
tails of his coat from under him, and stuck th
through the bars of the chair; and flesh and bl
could not resist pipeclaying them for him; and
pretty brushing he 'd have, I reckon, to get it
again. Well! at length he clears his throat uncomn
loud; so I spreads my duster, and shuts my eyes
ready; but when nought comed of it, I opened
eyes a little bit to see what he were about. My wo
if there he wasn't down on his knees right facing
staring as hard as he could. Well! I thought it wo
be hard work to stand that, if he made a long a
so I shut my eyes again, and tried to think seri
as became what I fancied were coming; but, for
me! but I thought why couldn't the fellow go in
pray wi' Master Thurstan, as had always a c
spirit ready for prayer, instead o' me, who had
dresser to scour, let alone an apron to iron. At
he says, says he, 'Sally! will you oblige me with y
hand?' So I thought it were, maybe, Metho
fashion to pray hand in hand; and I 'll not deny
I wished I 'd washed it better after black-leading
kitchen fire. I thought I 'd better tell him it w
not so clean as I could wish, so says I, 'Ma
Dixon, you shall have it, and welcome, if I may
go and wash 'em first.' But, says he, 'My dear S
dirty or clean it 's all the same to me, seeing
only speaking in a figuring way. What I 'm as
on my bended knees is, that you 'd please to be
kind as to be my wedded wife; week after next
suit me, if it 's agreeable to you!' My word! I w
up on my feet in an instant! It were odd

weren't it? I never thought of taking the fellow, and getting married; for all, I 'll not deny, I had been thinking it would be agreeable to be axed. But all at once, I couldn't abide the chap. 'Sir,' says I, trying to look shame-faced as became the occasion, but for all that, feeling a twittering round my mouth that I were afeard might end in a laugh — 'Master Dixon, I'm obleeged to you for the compliment, and thank ye all the same, but I think I'd prefer a single life.' He looked mighty taken aback, but in a minute he cleared up, and was as sweet as ever. He still kept on his knees, and I wished he 'd take himself up; but, I reckon, he thought it would give force to his words; says he, 'Think again, my dear Sally. I've a four-roomed house, and furniture conformable; and eighty pound a year. You may never have such a chance again.' There were truth enough in that, but it was not pretty in the man to say it; and it put me up a bit. 'As for that, neither you nor I can tell, Master Dixon. You 're not the first chap as I've had down on his knees afore me, axing me to marry him (you see I were thinking of John Rawson, only I thought there were no need to say he were on-all-fours — it were truth he were on his knees, you know), and maybe you 'll not be the last. Anyhow, I've no wish to change my condition just now.' 'I 'll wait till Christmas,' says he. 'I've a pig as will be ready for killing then, so I must get married before that.' Well now! would you believe it? the pig were a temptation. I 'd a receipt for curing hams, as Miss Faith would never let me try, saying the old way were good enough. However, I resisted. Says I, very stern, *because I felt I 'd* been wavering, 'Master Dixon, once

for all, pig or no pig, I'll not marry you. And if you'll take my advice, you'll get up off your knees. The flags is but damp yet, and it would be an awkward thing to have rheumatiz just before winter.' With that he got up, stiff enough. He looked as sulky a chap as ever I clapped eyes on. And as he were so black and cross, I thought I'd done well (whatever came of the pig) to say 'No' to him. 'You may live to repent this,' says he, very red. 'But I'll not be too hard upon ye, I'll give you another chance. I'll let you have the night to think about it, and I'll just call in to hear your second thoughts, after chapel to-morrow.' Well now! did ever you hear the like? But that is the way with all of them men, thinking so much of theirselves, and that it's but ask and have. They've never had me, though; and I shall be sixty-one next Martinmas, so there's not much time left for them to try me, I reckon. Well! when Jeremiah said that, he put me up more than ever, and I says, 'My first thoughts, second thoughts, and third thoughts is all one and the same; you've but tempted me once, and that was when you spoke of your pig. But of yoursel' you're nothing to boast on, and so I'll bid you good night, and I'll keep my manners, or else, if I told the truth, I should say it had been a great loss of time listening to you. But I'll be civil — so good-night.' He never said a word, but went off as black as thunder, slamming the door after him. The master called me in to prayers, but I can't say I could put my mind to them, for my heart was beating so. However, it was a comfort to have had an offer of holy *matrimony*; and though it flustered me, it made me *think* more of myself. In the night, I began to wonder

if I'd not been cruel and hard to him. You see, I were feverish-like; and the old song of Barbary Allen would keep running in my head, and I thought I were Barbary, and he were young Jemmy Gray, and that maybe he'd die for love of me; and I pictured him to mysel', lying on his death-bed, with his face turned to the wall, 'wi' deadly sorrow sighing,' and I could na' pinched mysel' for having been so like cruel Barbary Allen. And when I got up next day, I found it hard to think on the real Jerry Dixon I had seen the night before, apart from the sad and sorrowful Jerry I thought on a-dying, when I were between sleeping and waking. And for many a day I turned sick, when I heard the passing bell, for I thought it were the bell loud-knelling which were to break my heart wi' a sense of what I'd missed in saying 'No' to Jerry, and so killing him with cruelty. But in less than a three week, I heard parish bells a-ringing merrily for a wedding; and in the course of the morning, some one says to me, 'Hark! how the bells is ringing for Jerry Dixon's wedding!' And, all on a sudden, he changed back again from a heart-broken young fellow, like Jemmy Gray, into a stout, middle-aged man, ruddy complexioned, with a wart on his left cheek like life!"

Sally waited for some exclamation at the conclusion of her tale; but receiving none, he stepped softly to the bedside, and there lay Ruth, peaceful as death, with her baby on her breast.

"I thought I'd lost some of my gifts if I could not talk a body to sleep," said Sally, in a satisfied and *self-complacent tone*

Youth is strong and powerful, and makes a hard

battle against sorrow. So Ruth strove and strengthened, and her baby flourished accordingly; and before the little celandines were out on the hedge-banks, or the white violets had sent forth their fragrance from the border under the south wall of Miss Benson's small garden, Ruth was able to carry her baby into that sheltered place on sunny days.

She often wished to thank Mr. Benson and his sister, but she did not know how to tell the deep gratitude she felt, and therefore she was silent. But they understood her silence well. One day, as she watched her sleeping child, she spoke to Miss Benson, with whom she happened to be alone.

"Do you know of any cottage where the people are clean, and where they would not mind taking me in?" asked she.

"Taking you in! What do you mean?" said Miss Benson, dropping her knitting, in order to observe Ruth more closely.

"I mean," said Ruth, "where I might lodge with my baby — any very poor place would do, only it must be clean, or he might be ill."

"And what in the world do you want to go and lodge in a cottage for?" said Miss Benson, indignantly.

Ruth did not lift up her eyes, but she spoke with a firmness which showed that she had considered the subject.

"I think I could make dresses. I know I did learn as much as I might, but perhaps I might do servants, and people who are not particular."

"Servants are as particular as any one," said

enson, glad to lay hold of the first objection that ıe could.

"Well! somebody who would be patient with me," ıid Ruth.

"Nobody is patient over an ill-fitting gown," put ı Miss Benson. "There 's the stuff spoilt, and what ot?"

"Perhaps I could find plain work to do," said :uth, very meekly. "That I can do very well; mam- ıa taught me, and I liked to learn from her. If you ould be so good, Miss Benson, you might tell people could do plain work very neatly, and punctually, nd cheaply."

"You 'd get sixpence a day, perhaps," said Miss ienson, "and who would take care of baby, I should ike to know? Prettily he 'd be neglected, would not ıe? Why, he 'd have the croup and the typhus fever ı no time, and be burnt to ashes after."

"I have thought of all. Look how he sleeps! Hush, darling," for just at this point he began to ry, and to show his determination to be awake, as if ı contradiction to his mother's words. Ruth took im up, and carried him about the room while she ent on speaking.

"Yes, just now I know he will not sleep; but very ften he will, and in the night he always does."

"And so you 'd work in the night and kill your- elf, and leave your poor baby an orphan. Ruth! 'm ashamed of you. Now brother" (Mr. Benson had ust come in), "is not this too bad of Ruth; here she s planning to go away and leave us, just as we — as [, at least — have grown so fond of baby, and he 's eginning to know me."

"Where were you thinking of going to, Ruth?" interrupted Mr. Benson, with mild surprise.

"Anywhere to be near you and Miss Benson; in any poor cottage where I might lodge very cheaply, and earn my livelihood by taking in plain sewing, and perhaps a little dress-making; and where I could come and see you and dear Miss Benson sometimes and bring baby."

"If he was not dead before then of some fever, or burn, or scald, poor neglected child; or you had not worked yourself to death with never sleeping," said Miss Benson.

Mr. Benson thought a minute or two, and then he spoke to Ruth.

"Whatever you may do when this little fellow is a year old, and able to dispense with some of a mother's care, let me beg you, Ruth, as a favour to me — as a still greater favour to my sister, is it not, Faith?"

"Yes; you may put it so if you like."

"To stay with us," continued he, "till then. When baby is twelve months old, we 'll talk about it again, and very likely before then some opening may be shown us. Never fear leading an idle life, Ruth. We 'll treat you as a daughter, and set you all the household tasks; and it is not for your sake that we ask you to stay, but for this little dumb helpless child's; and it is not for our sake that you must stay, but for his."

Ruth was sobbing.

"I do not deserve your kindness," said she, in a broken voice; "I do not deserve it."

Her tears fell fast and soft like summer rain, but *no further* word was spoken. Mr. Benson quietly

ıssed on to make the inquiry for which he had en-
ed the room.

But when there was nothing to decide upon, and
necessity for entering upon any new course of ac-
ın, Ruth's mind relaxed from its strung-up state.
ıe fell into trains of reverie, and mournful regretful
collections which rendered her languid and tearful.
ıis was noticed both by Miss Benson and Sally, and
each had keen sympathies, and felt depressed when
ey saw any one near them depressed, and as each,
thout much reasoning on the cause or reason for
ch depression, felt irritated at the uncomfortable
ıte into which they themselves were thrown, they
th resolved to speak to Ruth on the next fitting
casion.

Accordingly, one afternoon — the morning of that
y had been spent by Ruth in house-work, for she
d insisted on Mr. Benson's words, and had taken
ss Benson's share of the more active and fatiguing
usehold duties, but she went through them heavily,
d as if her heart was far away — in the afternoon
ıen she was nursing her child, Sally, on coming into
back parlour, found her there alone, and easily
ected the fact that she was crying.

"Where's Miss Benson?" asked Sally, gruffly.

"Gone out with Mr. Benson," answered Ruth, with
absent sadness in her voice and manner. Her tears,
ırce checked while she spoke, began to fall afresh;
l as Sally stood and gazed she saw the babe look
k in his mother's face, and his little lip begin to
iver, and his open blue eye to grow over-clouded,
with some mysterious sympathy with the sorrowful
bent over him. Sally took him briskly from his

mother's arms; Ruth looked up in grave surprise, in truth she had forgotten Sally's presence, and suddenness of the motion startled her.

"My bonny boy! are they letting the salt t drop on thy sweet face before thou 'rt weaned! Li somebody knows how to be a mother — I could m a better myself. 'Dance, thumbkin, dance — dance merry men every one.' Ay, that 's it! smile, my pre Any one but a child like thee," continued she, turr to Ruth, "would have known better than to bring luck on thy babby by letting tears fall on its face fore it was weaned. But thou 'rt not fit to have a bal and so I 've said many a time. I 've a great min buy thee a doll, and take thy babby mysel'."

Sally did not look at Ruth, for she was too m engaged in amusing the baby with the tassel of string to the window-blind, or else she would have the dignity which the mother's soul put into Rutl that moment. Sally was quelled into silence by gentle composure, the self-command over her passio sorrow, which gave to Ruth an unconsciousness g deur of demeanour as she came up to the old serv

"Give him back to me, please. I did not k it brought ill-luck, or if my heart broke I would have let a tear drop on his face — I never will ag Thank you, Sally," as the servant relinquished hir her who came in the name of a mother. Sally wat Ruth's grave, sweet smile, as she followed up Sa play with the tassel, and imitated, with all the doc inspired by love, every movement and sound w had amused her babe.

"*Thou 'lt* be a mother, after all," said Sally, *a kind of* admiration of the control which Ruth

exercising over herself. "But why talk of thy heart breaking? I don't question thee about what's past and gone; but now thou'rt wanting for nothing, nor thy child either; the time to come is the Lord's, and in His hands; and yet thou goest about a-sighing and a-moaning in a way that I can't stand or thole."

"What do I do wrong?" said Ruth; "I try to do all I can."

"Yes, in a way," said Sally, puzzled to know how to describe her meaning. "Thou dost it — but there's a right and a wrong way of setting about everything — and to my thinking, the right way is to take a thing up heartily, if it is only making a bed. Why! dear ah me, making a bed may be done after a Christian fashion, I take it, or else what's to come of such as me in heaven, who've had little enough time on earth for clapping ourselves down on our knees for set prayers? When I was a girl, and wretched enough about Master Thurstan, and the crook on his back which came of the fall I gave him, I took to praying and sighing, and giving up the world; and I thought it were wicked to care for the flesh, so I made heavy puddings, and was careless about dinner and the rooms, and thought I was doing my duty, though I did call myself a miserable sinner. But one night, the old missus (Master Thurstan's mother) came in, and sat down by me, as I was a-scolding myself, without thinking of what I was saying; and, says she, 'Sally! what are you blaming yourself about, and groaning over? We hear you in the parlour every night, and it makes my heart ache.' 'Oh, Ma'am,' says I, 'I'*m a miserable* sinner, and I'm travailing in *the new birth.*' 'Was that the reason,' says she, 'why

the pudding was so heavy to-day?' 'Oh, Ma' Ma'am,' said I, 'if you would not think of the thi of the flesh, but trouble yourself about your immc soul.' And I sat a-shaking my head to think al her soul. 'But,' says she, in her sweet-drop voice, 'I do try to think of my soul every hour of day, if by that you mean trying to do the will of (but we'll talk now about the pudding; Master Thur could not eat it, and I know you'll be sorry for t Well! I was sorry, but I didn't choose to say so she seemed to expect me; so says I, 'It's a pit see children brought up to care for things of the fl and then I could have bitten my tongue out, for missus looked so grave, and I thought of my da little lad pining for want of his food. At last, she, 'Sally, do you think God has put us into world just to be selfish, and do nothing but see our own souls? or to help one another with heart hand, as Christ did to all who wanted help?' I silent, for, you see, she puzzled me. So she wen 'What is that beautiful answer in your Church chism, Sally?' I were pleased to hear a Dissente I did not think would have done it, speak so k ledgably about the catechism, and she went on: do my duty in that station of life unto which it please God to call me;" well, your station is a vant, and it is as honourable as a king's, if you at it right; you are to help and serve others in way, just as a king is to help others in another. what way are you to help and serve, or to do duty, in that station of life unto which it has pl *God to call* you? Did it answer God's purpose, *serve Him*, when the food was unfit for a child

and unwholesome for any one?' Well! I would not give it up, I was so pig-headed about my soul; so says I, 'I wish folks would be content with locusts and wild honey, and leave other folks in peace to work out their salvation;' and I groaned out pretty loud to think of missus's soul. I often think since she smiled a bit at me; but she said, 'Well, Sally, to-morrow, you shall have time to work out your salvation; but as we have no locusts in England, and I don't think they'd agree with Master Thurstan, if we had, I will come and make the pudding; but I shall try and do it well, not only for him to like it, but because everything may be done in a right way or a wrong; the right way is to do it as well as we can, as in God's sight; the wrong is to do it in a self-seeking spirit, which either leads us to neglect it to follow out some device of our own for our own ends, or to give up too much time and thought to it both before and after the doing.' Well! I thought of all old missus's words this morning, when I saw you making the beds. You sighed so, you could not half shake the pillows; your heart was not in your work; and yet it was the duty God had set you, I reckon; I know it's not the work parsons preach about; though I don't think they go so far off the mark when they read, 'whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, that do with all thy might.' Just try for a day to think of all the odd jobs as to be done well and truly as in God's sight, not just slurred over anyhow, and you'll go through them twice as cheerfully, and have no thought to spare for sighing or crying."

Sally bustled off to set on the kettle for tea, and *felt half ashamed, in* the quiet of the kitchen, to think

of the oration she had made in the parlour. saw with much satisfaction, that henceforwa nursed her boy with a vigour and cheerfuln were reflected back from him; and the househo was no longer performed with a languid indi as if life and duty were distasteful. Miss Ben her share in this improvement, though Sally took all the credit to herself. One day as Ruth sat together, Miss Benson spoke of th and thence went on to talk about her own ch By degrees they spoke of education, and th learning that forms one part of it; and the re that Ruth determined to get up early all thro bright summer mornings, to acquire the kn hereafter to be given to her child. Her mind cultivated, her reading scant; beyond the mere nical arts of education she knew nothing; but a refined taste, and excellent sense and judg separate the true from the false. With these q she set to work under Mr. Benson's direction read in the early morning the books that he out; she trained herself with strict perseveran all thoroughly; she did not attempt to acqu foreign language, although her ambition was Latin, in order to teach it to her boy. Those mornings were happy, for she was learning ne look backwards nor forwards, but to live faithf earnestly in the present. She rose while the sparrow was yet singing his *réveille* to his m dressed and opened her window, shading t blowing air and the sunny eastern light from h *If she grew* tired, she went and looked at h *all her thoughts* were holy prayers for him.

aze a while out of the high upper window on
ioorlands, that swelled in waves one behind
r, in the grey, cool morning light. These
: occasional relaxations, and after them she
with strength to her work.

CHAPTER XVII.

In that body of Dissenters to which M belonged, it is not considered necessary infants as early as the ceremony can be p and many circumstances concurred to cause t thanksgiving and dedication of the child (fo Dissenters look upon christenings) to be until it was probably somewhere about si old. There had been many conversations in sitting-room between the brother and sister *protégée*, which had consisted more of betraying a thoughtful wondering kind of on the part of Ruth, and answers more than explanatory from Mr. Benson; while son kept up a kind of running commentar simple and often quaint, but with that inti the very heart of all things truly religious often the gift of those who seem, at first sig only affectionate and sensible. When Mr had explained his own views of what a c ought to be considered, and, by calling o latent feelings into pious earnestness, brough a right frame of mind, he felt that he had d he could to make the ceremony more tha form, and to invest it, quiet, humble, and c *it must* necessarily be in outward shape — *and* anxious as much of its antecedents ha

— with the severe grandeur of an act done in faith
ıd truth.

It was not far to carry the little one, for, as I said,
ıe chapel almost adjoined the minister's house. The
hole procession was to have consisted of Mr. and
iss Benson, Ruth carrying her babe, and Sally, who
lt herself, as a Church-of-England woman, to be
ndescending and kind in requesting leave to attend
baptism among "them Dissenters;" but unless she
ıd asked permission, she would not have been
sired to attend, so careful was the habit of her
ıster and mistress that she should be allowed that
ıedom which they claimed for themselves. But
ey were glad she wished to go; they liked the
ling that all were of one household, and that the
ierests of one were the interests of all. It produced
consequence, however, which they did not an-
ipate. Sally was full of the event which her
esence was to sanction, and, as it were, to redeem
ım the character of being utterly schismatic; she
oke about it with an air of patronage to three or
ır, and among them to some of the servants at
:. Bradshaw's.

Miss Benson was rather surprised to receive a call
n Jemima Bradshaw, on the very morning of the
y on which little Leonard was to be baptised; Miss
adshaw was rosy and breathless with eagerness.
though the second in the family, she had been at
ıool when her younger sisters had been christened,
d she was now come, in the full warmth of a girl's
ıcy to ask if she might be present at the afternoon's
:vice. She had been struck with Mrs. Denbigh's
ıce *and beauty* at the very first sight, when she

had accompanied her mother to call upon the Bensons on their return from Wales; and had kept up an enthusiastic interest in the widow only a little older than herself, whose very reserve and retirement but added to her unconscious power of enchantment.

"Oh, Miss Benson! I never saw a christening; papa says I may go, if you think Mr. Benson and Mrs. Denbigh would not dislike it; and I will be quite quiet, and sit up behind the door, or anywhere; and that sweet little baby! I should so like to see him christened; is he to be called Leonard, did you say? After Mr. Denbigh, is it?"

"No — not exactly," said Miss Benson, rather discomfited.

"Was not Mr. Denbigh's name Leonard, then! Mamma thought it would be sure to be called after him, and so did I. But I may come to the christening, may I not, dear Miss Benson?"

Miss Benson gave her consent with a little inward reluctance. Both her brother and Ruth shared in this feeling, although no one expressed it; and it was presently forgotten.

Jemima stood grave and quiet in the old-fashioned vestry adjoining the chapel, as they entered with steps subdued to slowness. She thought Ruth looked so pale and awed because she was left a solitary parent; but Ruth came to the presence of God, as one who had gone astray, and doubted her own worthiness to be called His child; she came as a mother who had incurred a heavy responsibility, and who entreated His almighty aid to enable her to discharge it; full of passionate, yearning love *which* craved for more faith in God, to still her

distrust and fear of the future that might hang over her darling. When she thought of her boy, she sickened and trembled; but when she heard of God's loving kindness, far beyond all tender mother's love, she was hushed into peace and prayer. There she stood, her fair pale cheek resting on her baby's head, as he slumbered on her bosom; her eyes went slanting down under their half-closed white lids; but their gaze was not on the primitive cottage-like room, it was earnestly fixed on a dim mist, through which she fain would have seen the life that lay before her child; but the mist was still and dense, too thick a veil for anxious human love to penetrate. The future was hid with God.

Mr. Benson stood right under the casement window that was placed high up in the room; he was almost in shade, except for one or two marked lights which fell on hair already silvery white; his voice was always low and musical when he spoke to few; it was too weak to speak so as to be heard by many without becoming harsh and strange; but now it filled the little room with a loving sound, like the stock-dove's brooding murmur over her young. He and Ruth forgot all in their earnestness of thought; and when he said "Let us pray," and the little congregation knelt down, you might have heard the baby's faint breathing, scarcely sighing out upon the stillness, so absorbed were all in the solemnity. But the prayer was long; thought followed thought, and fear crowded upon fear, and all were to be laid bare before God, and His aid and counsel asked. Before the end, Sally had shuffled quietly out of the vestry into the *green chapel-yard,* upon which the door opened. Miss

Benson was alive to this movement, and so full of curiosity as to what it might mean that she could no longer attend to her brother, and felt inclined to rush off and question Sally, the moment all was ended. Miss Bradshaw hung about the babe and Ruth, and begged to be allowed to carry the child home, but Ruth pressed him to her, as if there was no safe harbour for him but in his mother's breast. Mr. Benson saw her feeling, and caught Miss Bradshaw's look of disappointment.

"Come home with us," said he, "and stay to tea. You have never drank tea with us since you went to school."

"I wish I might," said Miss Bradshaw, colouring with pleasure. "But I must ask papa. May I run home, and ask?"

"To be sure my dear!"

Jemima flew off; and fortunately her father was at home; for her mother's permission would have been deemed insufficient. She received many directions about her behaviour.

"Take no sugar in your tea, Jemima. I am sure the Bensons ought not to be able to afford sugar, with their means. And do not eat much; you can have plenty at home on your return; remember Mrs. Denbigh's keep must cost them a great deal."

So Jemima returned considerably sobered, and very much afraid of her hunger leading her to forget Mr. Benson's poverty. Meanwhile Miss Benson and Sally, acquainted with Mr. Benson's invitation to Jemima, set about making some capital tea-cakes on which they piqued themselves. They both enjoyed

the offices of hospitality; and were glad to place some home-made tempting dainty before their guests.

"What made ye leave the chapel-vestry before my brother had ended?" inquired Miss Benson.

"Indeed, Ma'am, I thought master had prayed so long he'd be drouthy. So I just slipped out to put on the kettle for tea."

Miss Benson was on the point of reprimanding her for thinking of anything besides the object of the prayer, when she remembered how she herself had been unable to attend after Sally's departure for wondering what had become of her; so she was silent.

It was a disappointment to Miss Benson's kind and hospitable expectation when Jemima, as hungry as a hound, confined herself to one piece of the cake which her hostess had had such pleasure in making. And Jemima wished she had not a prophetic feeling all tea-time of the manner in which her father would inquire into the particulars of the meal, elevating his eyebrows at every viand named beyond plain bread-and-butter, and winding up with some such sentence as this: "Well, I marvel how, with Benson's salary, he can afford to keep such a table." Sally could have told of self-denial when no one was by, when the left hand did not know what the right hand did, on the part of both her master and mistress, practised without thinking even to themselves that it was either a sacrifice or a virtue, in order to enable them to help those who were in need, or even to gratify Miss Benson's kind, old-fashioned feelings on such occasions as the present, when a stranger came to the house. Her homely, affectionate pleasure in making others comfortable, *might have* shown that such little occasional

extravagances were not waste, but a good work; and were not to be guaged by the standard of money spending. This evening her spirits were damped by Jemima's refusal to eat. Poor Jemima! the cakes were so good, and she was so hungry; but still she refused.

While Sally was clearing away the tea-things, Miss Benson and Jemima accompanied Ruth upstairs, where she went to put little Leonard to bed.

"A christening is a very solemn service," said Miss Bradshaw; "I had no idea it was so solemn. Mr. Benson seemed to speak as if he had a weight of care on his heart that God alone could relieve or lighten."

"My brother feels these things very much," said Miss Benson, rather wishing to cut short the conversation, for she had been aware of several parts in the prayer which she knew were suggested by the peculiarity and sadness of the case before him.

"I could not quite follow him all through," continued Jemima; "what did he mean by saying, 'This child, rebuked by the world and bidden to stand apart, thou wilt not rebuke, but wilt suffer it to come to thee and be blessed with thine almighty blessing?' Why is this little darling to be rebuked? I do not think I remember the exact words, but he said something like that."

"My dear! your gown is dripping wet! it must have dipped into the tub; let me wring it out."

"Oh, thank you! Never mind my gown!" said Jemima, hastily, and wanting to return to her question; but just then she caught the sight of tears falling fast *down the* cheeks of the silent Ruth as she bent

her child, crowing and splashing away in his tub. With a sudden consciousness that unwittingly she had touched on some painful chord, Jemima rushed into another subject, and was eagerly seconded by Miss Benson. The circumstance seemed to die away, and leave no trace; but in after-years it rose, vivid and significant, before Jemima's memory. At present it was enough for her, if Mrs. Denbigh would let her serve her in every possible way. Her admiration for beauty was keen, and little indulged at home; and Ruth was very beautiful in her quiet mournfulness; her mean and homely dress left her herself only the more open to admiration, for she gave it a charm by her unconscious wearing of it that made it seem like the drapery of an old Greek statue — subordinate to the figure it covered, yet imbued by it with an unspeakable grace. Then the pretended circumstances of her life were such as to catch the imagination of a young romantic girl. Altogether, Jemima could have kissed her hand and professed herself Ruth's slave. She moved away all the articles used at this little *coucher;* she folded up Leonard's day-clothes; she felt only too much honoured when Ruth trusted him to her for a few minutes — only too amply rewarded when Ruth thanked her with a grave, sweet smile, and a grateful look of her loving eyes.

When Jemima had gone away with the servant who was sent to fetch her, there was a little chorus of praise.

"She's a warm-hearted girl," said Miss Benson. "She remembers all the old days before she went to school. She is worth two of Mr. Richard. They're *each of them* just the same as they were when they

were children, when they broke that window in the chapel, and he ran away home, and she came knocking at our door, with a single knock, just like a beggar's, and I went to see who it was, and was quite startled to see her round, brown, honest face looking up at me, half-frightened, and telling me what she had done, and offering me the money in her savings bank to pay for it. We never should have heard of Master Richard's share in the business if it had not been for Sally."

"But remember," said Mr. Benson, "how strict Mr. Bradshaw has always been with his children. It is no wonder if poor Richard was a coward in those days."

"He is now, or I'm much mistaken," answered Miss Benson. "And Mr. Bradshaw was just as strict with Jemima, and she's no coward. But I've no faith in Richard. He has a look about him that I don't like. And when Mr. Bradshaw was away on business in Holland last year, for those months my young gentleman did not come half as regularly to chapel, and I always believe that story of his being seen out with the hounds at Smithiles."

"Those are neither of them great offences in a young man of twenty," said Mr. Benson, smiling.

"No! I don't mind them in themselves; but when he could change back so easily to being regular and mim when his father came home, I don't like that."

"Leonard shall never be afraid of me," said Ruth, following her own train of thought. "I will be his friend from the very first; and I will try and learn how to be a wise friend, and you will teach me, won't *you, Sir?*"

"What made you wish to call him Leonard, Ruth?" asked Miss Benson.

"It was my mother's father's name; and she used to tell me about him and his goodness, and I thought if Leonard could be like him ——"

"Do you remember the discussion there was about Miss Bradshaw's name, Thurstan? Her father wanting her to be called Hepzibah, but insisting that she was to have a Scripture name at any rate; and Mrs. Bradshaw wanting her to be Juliana, after some novel she had read not long before; and at last Jemima was fixed upon, because it would do either for a Scripture name or a name for a heroine out of a book."

"I did not know Jemima was a Scripture name," said Ruth.

"Oh yes, it is. One of Job's daughters; Jemima, Kezia, and Keren-Happuch. There are a good many Jemimas in the world, and some Kezias, but I never heard of a Keren-Happuch; and yet we know just as much of one as of another. People really like a pretty name, whether in Scripture or out of it."

"When there is no particular association with the name," said Mr. Benson.

"Now, I was called Faith after the cardinal virtue; and I like my name, though many people would think it too Puritan; that was according to our gentle mother's pious desire. And Thurstan was called by his name because my father wished it; for, although he was what people called a radical and a democrat in his ways of talking and thinking, he was very proud in his heart of being descended from some old Sir Thurstan, who figured away in the French wars."

"*The difference* between theory and practice, think-

ing and being," put in Mr. Benson, who was in a mood for allowing himself a little social enjoyment He leant back in his chair, with his eyes looking at but not seeing the ceiling. Miss Benson was chirpin away with her eternal knitting-needles, looking at he brother, and seeing him, too. Ruth was arranging he child's clothes against the morrow. It was but thei usual way of spending an evening; the variety wa given by the different tone which the conversatio assumed on the different nights. Yet, somehow, th peacefulness of the time, the window open into th little garden, the scents that came stealing in, and th clear summer heaven above, made the time be re membered as a happy festival by Ruth. Even Sall seemed more placid than usual when she came in t prayers; and she and Miss Benson followed Ruth t her bedroom, to look at the beautiful sleeping Leonard

"God bless him!" said Miss Benson, stoopin down to kiss his little dimpled hand, which lay out side the coverlet, tossed abroad in the heat of th evening.

"Now, don't get up too early, Ruth! Injurin your health will be short-sighted wisdom, and poo economy. Good night!"

"Good night, dear Miss Benson. Good night Sally." When Ruth had shut her door, she went agai to the bed, and looked at her boy till her eyes fille with tears.

"God bless thee, darling! I only ask to be one o His instruments, and not thrown aside as useless — or worse than useless."

So ended the day of Leonard's christening.

Mr. Benson had sometimes taught the children o

different people as an especial favour, when requested by them. But then his pupils were only children, and by their progress he was little prepared for Ruth's. She had had early teaching, of that kind which need never be unlearnt, from her mother; enough to unfold many of her powers; they had remained inactive now for several years, but had grown strong in the dark and quiet time. Her tutor was surprised at the bounds by which she surmounted obstacles, the quick perception and ready adaptation of truths and first principles, and her immediate sense of the fitness of things. Her delight in what was strong and beautiful called out her master's sympathy; but, most of all, he admired the complete unconsciousness of uncommon power, or unusual progress. It was less of a wonder than he considered it to be, it is true, for she never thought of comparing what she was now with her former self, much less with another. Indeed, she did not think of herself at all, but of her boy, and what she must learn in order to teach him to be and to do as suited her hope and her prayer. If any one's devotion could have flattered her into self-consciousness, it was Jemima's. Mr. Bradshaw never dreamed that his daughter could feel herself inferior to the minister's *protégée*, but so it was; and no knight-errant of old could consider himself more honoured by his ladye's commands than did Jemima, if Ruth allowed her to do anything for her or for her boy. Ruth loved her heartily, even while she was rather annoyed at the open expressions Jemima used of admiration.

"Please, I really would rather not be told if people do think me pretty."

"*But it was not* merely beautiful; it was sweet-

looking and good, Mrs. Postlethwaite called you," replied Jemima.

"All the more I would rather not hear it. I may be pretty, but I know I am not good. Besides, I don't think we ought to hear what is said of us behind our backs."

Ruth spoke so gravely, that Jemima feared lest she was displeased.

"Dear Mrs. Denbigh, I never will admire or praise you again. Only let me love you."

"And let me love you!" said Ruth, with a tender kiss.

Jemima would not have been allowed to come so frequently if Mr. Bradshaw had not been possessed with the idea of patronising Ruth. If the latter had chosen, she might have gone dressed from head to foot in the presents which he wished to make her, but she refused them constantly; occasionally to Miss Benson's great annoyance. But if he could not load her with gifts, he could show his approbation by asking her to his house; and after some deliberation, she consented to accompany Mr. and Miss Benson there. The house was square and massy-looking, with a great deal of drab-colour about the furniture. Mrs. Bradshaw, in her lack-a-daisical, sweet-tempered way, seconded her husband in his desire of being kind to Ruth; and as she cherished privately a great taste for what was beautiful or interesting, as opposed to her husband's love of the purely useful, this taste of hers had rarely had so healthy and true a mode of gratification as when she watched Ruth's movements about the room, which seemed in its unobtrusiveness and poverty of colour to receive the requisite ornament of light and

splendour from Ruth's presence. Mrs. Bradshaw sighed, and wished she had a daughter as lovely, about whom to weave a romance; for castle-building, after the manner of the Minerva press, was the outlet by which she escaped from the pressure of her prosaic life, as Mr. Bradshaw's wife. Her perception was only of external beauty, and she was not always alive to that, or she might have seen how a warm, affectionate, ardent nature, free from all envy or carking care of self, gave an unspeakable charm to her plain, bright-faced daughter Jemima, whose dark eyes kept challenging admiration for her friend. The first evening spent at Mr. Bradshaw's passed like many succeeding visits there. There was tea, the equipage for which was as handsome and as ugly as money could purchase. Then the ladies produced their sewing, while Mr. Bradshaw stood before the fire, and gave the assembled party the benefit of his opinions on many subjects. The opinions were as good and excellent as the opinions of any man can be who sees one side of a case very strongly, and almost ignores the other. They coincided in many points with those held by Mr. Benson, but he once or twice interposed with a plea for those who might differ; and then he was heard by Mr. Bradshaw with a kind of evident and indulgent pity, such as one feels for a child who unwittingly talks nonsense. By-and-by, Mrs. Bradshaw and Miss Benson fell into one *tête-à-tête*, and Ruth and Jemima into another. Two well-behaved but unnaturally quiet children were sent to bed early in the evening, in an authoritative voice, by their father, because one of them had spoken too loud while he was *enlarging on an alteration in the tariff.* Just before

the supper-tray was brought in, a gentleman was announced whom Ruth had never previously seen, but who appeared well known to the rest of the party. It was Mr. Farquhar, Mr. Bradshaw's partner; he had been on the Continent for the last year, and had only recently returned. He seemed perfectly at home, but spoke little. He leaned back in his chair, screwed up his eyes, and watched everybody; yet there was nothing unpleasant or impertinent in his keenness of observation. Ruth wondered to hear him contradict Mr. Bradshaw, and almost expected some rebuff, but Mr. Bradshaw, if he did not yield the point, admitted, for the first time that evening, that it was possible something might be said on the other side. Mr. Farquhar differed also from Mr. Benson, but it was in a more respectful manner than Mr. Bradshaw had done. For these reasons, although Mr. Farquhar had never spoken to Ruth, she came away with the impression that he was a man to be respected, and perhaps liked.

Sally would have thought herself mightily aggrieved if, on their return, she had not heard some account the evening. As soon as Miss Benson came in, t old servant began:

"Well, and who was there? and what did th give you for supper?"

"Only Mr. Farquhar besides ourselves; and sa wiches, sponge-cake, and wine; there was no occa for anything more," replied Miss Benson, who tired and preparing to go up-stairs.

"Mr. Farquhar! Why they do say he's thinki Miss Jemima!"

"*Nonsense*, Sally! why he's old enough to

father!" said Miss Benson, half-way up the first flight.

"There 's no need for it to be called nonsense, though he may be ten year older," muttered Sally, retreating towards the kitchen. "Bradshaw's Betsy knows what she 's about, and wouldn't have said it for nothing."

Ruth wondered a little about it. She loved Jemima well enough to be interested in what related to her; but, after thinking for a few minutes, she decided that such a marriage was, and would ever be, very unlikely.

CHAPTER XVIII.

One afternoon, not long after this, Mr. and Miss Benson set off to call upon a farmer, who attended the chapel, but lived at some distance from the town. They intended to stay to tea if they were invited, and Ruth and Sally were left to spend a long afternoon together. At first, Sally was busy in her kitchen, and Ruth employed herself in carrying her baby out into the garden. It was now nearly a year since she came to the Bensons'; it seemed like yesterday, and yet as if a life time had gone between. The flowers were budding now, that were all in bloom when she came down, on the first autumnal morning, into the sunny parlour. The yellow jessamine, that was then a tender plant, had now taken firm root in the soil, and was sending out strong shoots; the wall-flowers, which Miss Benson had sown on the wall a day or two after her arrival, were scenting the air with their fragrant flowers. Ruth knew every plant now; it seemed as though she had always lived here, and always known the inhabitants of the house. She heard Sally singing her accustomed song in the kitchen, a song she never varied over her afternoon's work. It began,

> As I was going to Derby, Sir,
> Upon a market-day.

And if music is a necessary element in a song, perhaps *I* had better call it by some other name.

But the strange change was in Ruth herself. She was conscious of it though she could not define it, and did not dwell upon it. Life had become significant and full of duty to her. She delighted in the exercise of her intellectual powers, and liked the idea of the infinite amount of which she was ignorant; for it was a grand pleasure to learn — to crave, and be satisfied. She strove to forget what had gone before this last twelve months. She shuddered up from contemplating it; it was like a bad, unholy dream. And yet, there was a strange yearning kind of love for the father of the child whom she pressed to her heart, which came, and she could not bid it begone as sinful, it was so pure and natural, even when thinking of it, as in the sight of God. Little Leonard cooed to the flowers, and stretched after their bright colours; and Ruth laid him on the dry turf, and pelted him with the gay petals. He chinked and crowed with laughing delight, and clutched at her cap, and pulled it off. Her short rich curls were golden-brown in the slanting sunlight, and by their very shortness made her look more child-like. She hardly seemed as if she could be the mother of the noble babe over whom she knelt, now snatching kisses, now matching his cheek with rose leaves. All at once, the bells of the old church struck the hour; and far away, high up in the air, began slowly to play the old tune of "Life let us cherish;" they had played it for years — for the life of man — and it always sounded fresh and strange and aërial. Ruth was still in a moment, she knew not why; and the tears came into her eyes as she listened. When it was ended, she kissed her baby, and bade God bless him.

Just then Sally came out, dressed for the evening, with a leisurely look about her. She had done her work, and she and Ruth were to drink tea together in the exquisitely clean kitchen; but while the kettle was boiling, she came out to enjoy the flowers. She gathered a piece of southern-wood, and stuffed it up her nose, by way of smelling it.

"Whatten you call this in your country?" asked she.

"Old-man," replied Ruth.

"We call it here lad's-love. It and peppermint-drops always remind me of going to church in the country. Here! I'll get you a black currant-leaf to put in the teapot. It gives it a flavour. We had bees once against this wall; but when missus died, we forgot to tell 'em, and put 'em in mourning, and, in course, they swarmed away without our knowing, and the next winter came a hard frost, and they died. Now, I dare say, the water will be boiling; and it's time for little master there to come in, for the dew is falling. See, all the daisies is shutting themselves up."

Sally was most gracious as a hostess. She quite put on her company manners to receive Ruth in the kitchen. They laid Leonard to sleep on the sofa in the parlour, that they might hear him the more easily, and then they sat quietly down to their sewing by the bright kitchen fire. Sally was, as usual, the talker; and, as usual, the subject was the family of whom for so many years she had formed a part.

"Ay! things was different when I was a girl," quoth she. "Eggs was thirty for a shilling, and butter *only six*pence a pound. My wage when I came here

was but three pound, and I did on it, and was always clean and tidy, which is more than many a lass can say now who gets her seven and eight pound a year; and tea was kept for an afternoon drink, and pudding was eaten afore meat in them days, and the upshot was, people paid their debts better; ay, ay! we'n gone backwards, and we thinken we'n gone forrards."

After shaking her head a little over the degeneracy of the times, Sally returned to a part of the subject on which she thought she had given Ruth a wrong idea.

"You'll not go for to think now that I've not more than three pound a year. I've a deal above that now. First of all, old missus gave me four pound, for she said I were worth it, and I thought in my heart that I were; so I took it without more ado; but after her death, Master Thurstan and Miss Faith took a fit of spending, and says they to me, one day as I carried tea in, 'Sally, we think your wages ought to be raised.' 'What matter what you think!' said I, pretty sharp, for I thought they'd ha' shown more respect to missus if they'd let things stand as they were in her time; and they'd gone and moved the sofa away from the wall to where it stands now, already that very day. So I speaks up sharp, and, says I, 'As long as I'm content, I think it's no business of yours to be meddling wi' me and my money matters.' 'But', says Miss Faith (she's always the one to speak first if you'll notice, though it's master that comes in and clinches the matter with some reason she'd never ha' thought of — he were always a sensible lad), 'Sally, all the servants in the town have six pound and better, *and you have as* hard a place as any of 'em.' 'Did

you ever hear me grumble about my work that you talk about it in that way? wait till I grumble,' says I, 'but don't meddle wi' me till then.' So I flung off in a huff; but in the course of the evening, Master Thurstan came in and sat down in the kitchen, and he's such winning ways he wiles one over to anything; and besides, a notion had come into my head — now you'll not tell," said she, glancing round the room, and hitching her chair nearer to Ruth in a confidential manner; Ruth promised, and Sally went on:

"I thought I should like to be an heiress wi' money, and leave it all to Master and Miss Faith; and I thought if I 'd six pound a year I could, maybe, get to be an heiress; all I was feared on was that some chap or other might marry me for my money, but I've managed to keep the fellows off; so I looks mim and grateful, and I thanks Master Thurstan for his offer, and I takes the wages; and what do you think I've done?" asked Sally, with an exultant air.

"What have you done?" asked Ruth.

"Why," replied Sally, slowly and emphatically, "I've saved thirty pound! but that's not it. I've getten a lawyer to make me a will; that's it, wench!" said she, slapping Ruth on the back.

"How did you manage it?" asked Ruth.

"Ay, that was it," said Sally; "I thowt about it many a night before I hit on the right way. I was afeared the money might be thrown into Chancery if I didn't make it all safe, and yet I could na' ask Master Thurstan. At last and at length, John Jackson, the grocer, had a nephew come to stay a week with him, as was 'prentice to a lawyer in Liverpool; so now was *my time*, and here was my lawyer. Wait a minute! I

could tell you my story better if I had my will in my hand; and I'll scomfish you if ever you go for to tell."

She held up her hand, and threatened Ruth as she left the kitchen to fetch the will.

When she came back, she brought a parcel tied up in a blue pocket-handkerchief; she sat down, squared her knees, untied the handkerchief, and displayed a small piece of parchment.

"Now, do you know what this is?" said she, holding it up. "It's parchment, and it's the right stuff to make wills on. People gets into Chancery if they don't make them o' this stuff, and I reckon Tom Jackson thowt he'd have a fresh job on it if he could get it into Chancery; for the rascal went and wrote it on a piece of paper at first, and came and read it me out loud off a piece of paper no better than what one writes letters upon. I were up to him; and, thinks I, come, come, my lad, I'm not a fool, though you may think so; I know a paper will won't stand, but I'll let you run your rig. So I sits and I listens. And would you belie' me, he read it out as if it were as clear a business as your giving me that thimble — no more ado, though it were thirty pound! I could understand it mysel' — that were no law for me. I wanted summat to consider about, and for th' meaning to be wrapped up as I wrap up my best gown. So says I, 'Tom! it's not on parchment. I mun have it on parchment.' 'This 'ill do as well,' says he. 'We'll get it witnessed, and it will stand good.' Well! I liked the notion of having it witnessed, and for a while that soothed me; but after a bit, I felt I should like it done *according* to law, and not plain out as *anybody might ha'* done it; I mysel', if I could have

written. So says I, 'Tom! I mun have it on parchment.' 'Parchment costs money,' says he, very grave. 'Oh, oh, my lad! are ye there?' thinks I. 'That's the reason I'm clipped of law.' So says I, 'Tom! I mun have it on parchment. I'll pay the money and welcome. It's thirty pound, and what I can lay to it. I'll make it safe. It shall be on parchment, and I'll tell thee what, lad! I'll gie ye sixpence for every good law-word you put in it, sounding like, and not to be caught up as a person runs. Your master had need to be ashamed of you as a 'prentice if you can't do a thing more tradesman-like than this!' Well! he laughed above a bit, but I were firm, and stood to it. So he made it out on parchment. Now, woman, try and read it!" said she, giving it to Ruth.

Ruth smiled, and began to read; Sally listening with rapt attention. When Ruth came to the word "testatrix," Sally stopped her.

"That was the first sixpence," said she. "I thowt he was going to fob me off again wi' plain language; but when that word came, I out wi' my sixpence, and gave it to him on the spot. Now go on."

Presently Ruth read, "accruing."

"That was the second sixpence. Four sixpences it were in all, besides six-and-eightpence as we bargained at first, and three-and-fourpence parchment. There! that's what I call a will; witnessed according to law, and all. Master Thurstan will be prettily taken in when I die, and he finds all his extra wage left back to him. But it will teach him it's not so easy as he thinks for, to make a woman give up her *way.*"

The time was now drawing near when little Leon-

rd might be weaned — the time appointed by all ıree for Ruth to endeavour to support herself in ›me way more or less independent of Mr. and Miss enson. This prospect dwelt much in all of their inds, and was in each shaded with some degree of ırplexity; but they none of them spoke of it for fear accelerating the event. If they had felt clear and ıtermined as to the best course to be pursued, they ere none of them deficient in courage to commence ›on that course at once. Miss Benson would, per-ıps, have objected the most to any alteration in their ·esent daily mode of life; but that was because she ıd the habit of speaking out her thoughts as they ·ose, and she particularly disliked and dreaded change. esides this, she had felt her heart open out, and arm towards the little helpless child, in a strong and ›werful manner. Nature had intended her warm in-incts to find vent in a mother's duties; her heart ıd yearned after children, and made her restless in ır childless state, without her well knowing why; ıt now, the delight she experienced in tending, nur-ng, and contriving for the little boy — even con-iving to the point of sacrificing many of her cherish-l whims — made her happy and satisfied and peace-l. It was more difficult to sacrifice her whims than ır comforts; but all had been given up when and here required by the sweet lordly baby, who reigned ıramount in his very helplessness.

From some cause or other, an exchange of mi-sters for one Sunday was to be effected with a ·ighbouring congregation, and Mr. Benson went on short absence from home. When he returned on *onday, he was* met at the house-door by his sister,

who had evidently been looking out for him some time. She stepped out to greet him.

"Don't hurry yourself, Thurstan! all 's well; only I wanted to tell you something. Don't fidget yourself — baby is quite well, bless him! It 's only good news. Come into your room, and let me talk a little quietly with you."

She drew him into his study, which was near the outer door, and then she took off his coat, and put his carpet-bag in a corner, and wheeled a chair to the fire, before she would begin.

"Well, now! to think how often things fall out just as we want them, Thurstan! Have not you often wondered what was to be done with Ruth when the time came at which we promised her she should earn her living? I am sure you have, because I have so often thought about it myself. And yet I never dared to speak out my fear, because that seemed giving it a shape. And now Mr. Bradshaw has put all to rights. He invited Mr. Jackson to dinner yesterday, just as we were going into chapel; and then he turned to me and asked me if I would come to tea — straight from afternoon chapel, because Mrs. Bradshaw wanted to speak to me. He made it very clear I was not to bring Ruth; and, indeed, she was only too happy to stay at home with baby. And so I went; and Mrs. Bradshaw took me into her bedroom, and shut the doors, and said Mr. Bradshaw had told her, that he did not like Jemima being so much confined with the younger ones while they were at their lessons, and that he wanted some one above a nursemaid to sit *with them* while their masters were there — some *one who* would see about their learning their lessons,

and who would walk out with them; a sort of nursery governess I think she meant, though she did not say so; and Mr. Bradshaw (for, of course, I saw his thoughts and words constantly peeping out, though he had told her to speak to me) believed that our Ruth would be the very person. Now, Thurstan, don't look so surprised, as if she had never come into your head! I am sure I saw what Mrs. Bradshaw was driving at, long before she came to the point; and I could scarcely keep from smiling, and saying, 'We'd jump at the proposal' — long before I ought to have known anything about it."

"Oh, I wonder what we ought to do!" said Mr. Benson. "Or rather, I believe I see what we ought to do, if I durst but do it."

"Why, what ought we to do?" asked his sister, in surprise.

"I ought to go and tell Mr. Bradshaw the whole story —"

"And get Ruth turned out of our house," said Miss Benson, indignantly.

"They can't make us do that," said her brother. "I do not think they would try."

"Yes, Mr. Bradshaw would try; and he would blazon out poor Ruth's sin, and there would not be a chance for her left. I know him well, Thurstan; and why should he be told now, more than a year ago?"

"A year ago, he did not want to put her in a situation of trust about his children."

"And you think she'll abuse that trust, do you? You've lived a twelvemonth in the house with Ruth, *and the end of it is*, you think she will do his chil-

dren harm! Besides, who encouraged Jemima to come to the house so much to see Ruth? Did you not say it would do them both good to see something of each other?"

Mr. Benson sat thinking.

"If you had not known Ruth as well as you do — if during her stay with us you had marked anything wrong, or forward, or deceitful, or immodest, I would say at once, don't allow Mr. Bradshaw to take her into his house; but still I would say, don't tell of her sin and her sorrow to so severe a man — so unpitiful a judge. But here I ask you, Thurstan, can you or I, or Sally (quick-eyed as she is), say, that in any one thing we have had true, just occasion to find fault with Ruth? I don't mean that she is perfect — she acts without thinking, her temper is sometimes warm and hasty; but have we any right to go and injure her prospects for life, by telling Mr. Bradshaw all we know of her errors — only sixteen when she did so wrong, and never to escape from it all her many years to come — to have the despair which would arise from its being known, clutching her back into worse sin? What harm do you think she can do? What is the risk to which you think you are exposing Mr Bradshaw's children?" She paused, out of breath, her eyes glittering with tears of indignation, and impatient for an answer, that she might knock it to pieces.

"I do not see any danger that can arise," said he at length, and with slow difficulty, as if not fully convinced. "I have watched Ruth, and I believe she is *pure and truthful*! and the very sorrow and penitence *she has felt* — the very suffering she has gone through

—has given her a thoughtful conscientiousness beyond her age."

"That and the care of her baby," said Miss Benson, secretly delighted at the tone of her brother's thoughts.

"Ah, Faith! that baby you so much dreaded once, s turning out a blessing, you see," said Thurstan, vith a faint, quiet smile.

"Yes! any one might be thankful, and better too, or Leonard; but how could I tell that it would be ike him?"

"But to return to Ruth and Mr. Bradshaw. What id you say?"

"Oh! with my feelings, of course, I was only too lad to accept the proposal, and so I told Mrs. Bradhaw then; and I afterwards repeated it to Mr. Bradhaw, when he asked me if his wife had mentioned heir plans. They would understand that I must conult you and Ruth, before it could be considered as inally settled."

"And have you named it to her?"

"Yes," answered Miss Benson, half afraid lest he hould think she had been too precipitate.

"And what did she say?" asked he, after a little ause of grave silence.

"At first she seemed very glad, and fell into my nood of planning how it should all be managed; how Sally and I should take care of the baby the hours hat she was away at Mr. Bradshaw's; but by-and-by she became silent and thoughtful, and knelt down by ne and hid her face in my lap, and shook a little as f she *was crying;* and then I heard her speak in a *ery low smothered* voice, for her head was still bent

down — quite hanging down, indeed, so that I could not see her face, so I stooped to listen, and I heard her say, 'Do you think I should be good enough to teach little girls, Miss Benson?' She said it so humbly and fearfully that all I thought of was how to cheer her, and I answered and asked her if she did not hope to be good enough to bring up her own darling to be a brave Christian man? And she lifted up her head, and I saw her eyes looking wild and wet and earnest, and she said, 'With God's help, that will I try to make my child.' And I said then, 'Ruth, as you strive and as you pray for your own child, so you must strive and pray to make Mary and Elizabeth good, if you are trusted with them.' And she said out quite clear, though her face was hidden from me once more, 'I will strive, and I will pray.' You would not have had any fears, Thurstan, if you could have heard and seen her last night."

"I have no fear," said he, decidedly. "Let the plan go on." After a minute, he added, "But I am glad it was so far arranged before I heard of it. My indecision about right and wrong — my perplexity as to how far we are to calculate consequences — grows upon me, I fear."

"You look tired and weary, dear. You should blame your body rather than your conscience at these times."

"A very dangerous doctrine."

The scroll of Fate was closed, and they could not foresee the Future; and yet, if they could have seen it, though they might have shrank fearfully at first, they *would have* smiled and thanked God when all was *done and said.*

CHAPTER XIX.

THE quiet days grew into weeks and months, and even years, without any event to startle the little circle into the consciousness of the lapse of time. One who had known them at the date of Ruth's becoming a governess in Mr. Bradshaw's family, and had been absent until the time of which I am now going to tell you, would have noted some changes which had imperceptibly come over all; but he, too, would have thought, that the life which had brought so little of turmoil and vicissitude must have been calm and tranquil, and in accordance with the bygone activity of the town in which their existence passed away.

The alterations that he would have perceived were those caused by the natural progress of time. The Benson home was brightened into vividness by the presence of the little Leonard, now a noble boy of six, large and grand in limb and stature, and with a face of marked beauty and intelligence. Indeed, he might have been considered by many as too intelligent for his years; and often the living with old and thoughtful people gave him, beyond most children, the appearance of pondering over the mysteries which meet the young on the threshold of life, but which fade away as advancing years bring us more into contact with the practical and tangible — fade away and vanish, until it seems to require the agitation of some great storm of *the soul before we can* again realise spiritual things.

But, at times, Leonard seemed oppressed and bewildered, after listening intent, with grave and wondering eyes, to the conversation around him; at others, the bright animal life shone forth radiant, and no three-months' kitten — no foal, suddenly tossing up its heels by the side of its sedate dam, and careering around the pasture in pure mad enjoyment — no young creature of any kind, could show more merriment and gladness of heart.

"For ever in mischief," was Sally's account of him at such times; but it was not intentional mischief; and Sally herself would have been the first to scold any one else who had used the same words in reference to her darling. Indeed, she was once nearly giving warning, because she thought the boy was being ill-used. The occasion was this: Leonard had for some time shown a strange odd disregard of truth; he invented stories, and told them with so grave a face, that unless there was some internal evidence of their incorrectness (such as describing a cow with a bonnet on), he was generally believed, and his statements, which were given with the full appearance of relating a real occurrence, had once or twice led to awkward results. All the three, whose hearts were pained by this apparent unconsciousness of the difference between truth and falsehood, were unaccustomed to children, or they would have recognised this as a stage through which most infants, who have lively imaginations, pass; and, accordingly, there was a consultation in Mr. Benson's study one morning. Ruth was there, quiet, very pale, and with compressed lips, sick at heart as she heard Miss Benson's arguments for the necessity of whipping, *in order to* cure Leonard of his story-telling. Mr. Benson

looked unhappy and uncomfortable. Education was but a series of experiments to them all, and they all had a secret dread of spoiling the noble boy, who was the darling of their hearts. And, perhaps, this very intensity of love begot an impatient, unnecessary anxiety, and made them resolve on sterner measures than the parent of a large family (where love was more spread abroad) would have dared to use. At any rate, the vote for whipping carried the day; and even Ruth, trembling and cold, agreed that it must be done; only she asked, in a meek, sad voice, if she need be present (Mr. Benson was to be the executioner — the scene, the study); and being instantly told that she had better not, she went slowly and languidly up to her room, and kneeling down, she closed her ears, and prayed.

Miss Benson, having carried her point, was very sorry for the child, and would have begged him off; but Mr. Benson had listened more to her arguments than now to her pleadings, and only answered, "If it is right, it shall be done!" He went into the garden, and deliberately, almost as if he wished to gain time, chose and cut off a little switch from the laburnum-tree. Then he returned through the kitchen, and gravely taking the awed and wondering little fellow by the hand, he led him silently into the study, and placing him before him, began an admonition on the importance of truthfulness, meaning to conclude with what he believed to be the moral of all punishment: "As you cannot remember this of yourself, I must give you a little pain to make you remember it. I am very sorry it is necessary, and that you cannot recollect without my doing so."

But before he had reached this very proper and desirable conclusion, and while he was yet working his way, his heart aching with the terrified look of the child at the solemnly sad face and words of upbraiding, Sally burst in:

"And what may ye be going to do with that fine switch I saw ye gathering, Master Thurstan?" asked she, her eyes gleaming with anger at the answer she knew must come, if answer she had at all.

"Go away, Sally," said Mr. Benson, annoyed at the fresh difficulty in his path.

"I'll not stir never a step till you give me that switch, as you've got for some mischief, I'll be bound."

"Sally! remember where it is said, 'He that spareth the rod, spoileth the child,'" said Mr. Benson, austerely.

"Ay, I remember; and I remember a bit more than you want me to remember, I reckon. It were King Solomon as spoke them words, and it were King Solomon's son that were King Rehoboam, and no great shakes either. I can remember what is said on him, II. Chronicles, xii. chapter, 14th v.: 'And he,' that's King Rehoboam, the lad that tasted the rod, 'did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.' I've not been reading my chapters every night for fifty year to be caught napping by a Dissenter, neither!" said she, triumphantly. "Come along, Leonard." She stretched out her hand to the child, thinking that she had conquered.

But Leonard did not stir. He looked wistfully at Mr. Benson. "Come!" said she, impatiently. The *boy's mouth* quivered.

"If you want to whip me, uncle, you may do it. don't much mind."

Put in this form, it was impossible to carry out his ıtentions; and so Mr. Benson told the lad he might › — that he would speak to him another time. Leonard ent away, more subdued in spirit than if he had been hipped. Sally lingered a moment. She stopped to ld: "I think it 's for them without sin to throw stones a poor child, and cut up good laburnum branches whip him. I only do as my betters do, when I call eonard's mother Mrs. —." The moment she had said is she was sorry; it was an ungenerous advantage ter the enemy had acknowledged himself defeated. r. Benson dropped his head upon his hands, and hid is face, and sighed deeply.

Leonard flew in search of his mother, as in search a refuge. If he had found her calm, he would have ırst into a passion of crying after his agitation; as it as, he came upon her kneeling and sobbing, and he ood quite still. Then he threw his arms round her ɛck, and said; "Mamma! mamma! I will be good — make a promise; I will speak true — I make a proise." And he kept his word.

Miss Benson piqued herself upon being less carried vay by her love for this child than any one else in .e house; she talked severely, and had capital theoes; but her severity ended in talk, and her theories ould not work. However, she read several books on lucation, knitting socks for Leonard all the while; ıd, upon the whole, I think, the hands were more sefully employed than the head, and the good honest ɛart better than either. She looked older than when ɔ *first knew her, but it* was a ripe, kindly age that

was coming over her. Her excellent practical sens perhaps, made her a more masculine character th her brother. He was often so much perplexed by t problems of life, that he let the time for action go b but she kept him in check by her clear, pithy ta which brought back his wandering thoughts to the du that lay straight before him, waiting for action; a then he remembered that it was the faithful part "wait patiently upon God," and leave the ends in I hands, who alone knows why Evil exists in this wor and why it ever hovers on either side of Good. In t respect, Miss Benson had more faith than her brot — or so it seemed; for quick, resolute action in t next step of Life was all she required, while he de berated and trembled, and often did wrong from l very deliberation, when his first instinct would ha led him right.

But although decided and prompt as ever, M Benson was grown older since the summer afterno when she dismounted from the coach at the foot of t long Welsh hill that led to Llan-dhu, where her brot awaited her to consult her about Ruth. Though l eye was as bright and straight-looking as ever, qu and brave in its glances, her hair had become alm snowy white; and it was on this point she consul Sally, soon after the date of Leonard's last untru The two were arranging Miss Benson's room o morning, when, after dusting the looking-glass, s suddenly stopped in her operation, and after a cl inspection of herself, startled Sally by this speech:

"Sally! I'm looking a great deal older than *used to do!*"

Sally, who was busy dilating on the increased y

of flour, considered this remark of Miss Benson's as strangely irrelevant to the matter in hand, and only noticed it by a

"To be sure! I suppose we all on us do. But two-and-fourpence a dozen is too much to make us pay for it."

Miss Benson went on with her inspection of herself, and Sally with her economical projects.

"Sally!" said Miss Benson, "my hair is nearly white. The last time I looked it was only pepper-and-salt. What must I do?"

"Do — why, what would the wench do?" asked Sally, contemptuously. "Ye're never going to be taken in, at your time of life, by hair-dyes and such gim-cracks, as can only take in young girls whose wisdom-teeth are not cut."

"And who are not very likely to want them," said Miss Benson, quietly. "No! but you see, Sally, it's very awkward having such grey hair, and feeling so young. Do you know, Sally, I've as great a mind for dancing, when I hear a lively tune on the street-organs, as ever; and as great a mind to sing when I'm happy — to sing in my old way, Sally, you know."

"Ay, you had it from a girl," said Sally; "and many a time, when the door's been shut, I did not know if it was you in the parlour, or a big bumble-bee in the kitchen, as was making that drumbling noise. I heard you at it yesterday."

"But an old woman with grey hair ought not to have a fancy for dancing or singing," continued Miss Benson.

"*Whatten nonsense* are ye talking?" said Sally,

roused to indignation. "Calling yoursel' an old woma when you're better than ten years younger than me and many a girl has grey hair at five-and-twenty."

"But I'm more than five-and-twenty, Sally — I'r fifty-seven next May!"

"More shame for ye, then, not to know better tha to talk of dyeing your hair. I cannot abide suc vanities!"

"Oh, dear! Sally, when will you understand wh I mean? I want to know how I'm to keep remembe ing how old I am, so as to prevent myself from feelin so young? I was quite startled just now to see m hair in the glass, for I can generally tell if my cap straight by feeling. I'll tell you what I'll do — I' cut off a piece of my grey hair, and plait it togeth for a marker in my Bible!" Miss Benson expecte applause for this bright idea, but Sally only mad answer:

"You'll be taking to painting your cheeks nex now you've once thought of dyeing your hair." S Miss Benson plaited her grey hair in silence and quie ness, Leonard holding one end of it while she wove i and admiring the colour and texture all the time, wi a sort of implied dissatisfaction at the auburn colo of his own curls, which was only half-comforted aw by Miss Benson's information, that, if he lived lo enough, his hair would be like hers.

Mr. Benson, who had looked old and frail whi he was yet but young, was now stationary as to t date of his appearance. But there was something mo of nervous restlessness in his voice and ways than fo merly; that was the only change six years had broug *to him.* And as for Sally, she chose to forget age

e passage of years altogether, and had as much work
her, to use her own expression, as she had at six-
en; nor was her appearance very explicit as to the
ght of time. Fifty, sixty, or seventy, she might be
· not more than the last, not less than the first —
ough her usual answer to any circuitous inquiry as
her age was now (what it had been for many years
st), "I 'm feared I shall never see thirty again."

Then as to the house. It was not one where the
ting-rooms are refurnished every two or three years;
t now, even (since Ruth came to share their living)
place where, as an article grew shabby or worn, a
w one was purchased. The furniture looked poor,
d the carpets almost threadbare; but there was such
dainty spirit of cleanliness abroad, such exquisite
atness of repair, and altogether so bright and cheer-
l a look about the rooms — everything so above-
ard — no shifts to conceal poverty under flimsy or-
ment — that many a splendid drawing-room would
ve less pleasure to those who could see evidences of
aracter in inanimate things. But whatever poverty
ere might be in the house, there was full luxuriance
the little square wall-encircled garden, on two sides
which the parlour and kitchen looked. The laburnum-
ee, which when Ruth came was like a twig stuck
to the ground, was now a golden glory in spring,
id a pleasant shade in summer. The wild hop, that
r. Benson had brought home from one of his country
mbles, and planted by the parlour-window, while
eonard was yet a baby in his mother's arms, was
w a garland over the casement, hanging down long
ndrils, *that waved in* the breezes, and threw pleasant
idows and traceries, like some old Bacchanalian car-

ving, on the parlour-walls, at "morn or dusky eve." The yellow rose had clambered up to the window of Mr. Benson's bedroom, and its blossom-laden branches were supported by a jargonelle pear-tree rich in autumnal fruit.

But, perhaps, in Ruth herself there was the greatest external change; for of the change which had gone on in her heart, and mind, and soul, or if there had been any, neither she nor any one around her was conscious; but sometimes Miss Benson did say to Sally, "How very handsome Ruth is grown!" To which Sally made ungracious answer, "Yes! she 's well enough. Beauty is deceitful, and favour a snare, and I 'm thankful the Lord has spared me from such man-traps and spring-guns." But even Sally could not help secretly admiring Ruth. If her early brilliancy of colouring was gone, a clear ivory skin, as smooth as satin, told of complete and perfect health, and was as lovely, if not so striking in effect, as the banished lilies and roses. Her hair had grown darker and deeper, in the shadow that lingered in its masses; her eyes, even if you could have guessed that they had shed bitter tears in their day, had a thoughtful spiritual look about them, that made you wonder at their depth, and look—and look again. The increase of dignity in her face had been imparted to her form. I do not know if she had grown taller since the birth of her child, but she looked as if she had. And although she had lived in a very humble home, yet there was something about either it or her, or the people amongst whom she *had been* thrown during the last few years, which *had so* changed her, that whereas, six or seven years

ago, you would have perceived that she was not altogether a lady by birth and education, yet now she might have been placed among the highest in the land, and would have been taken by the most critical judge for their equal, although ignorant of their conventional etiquette — an ignorance which she would have acknowledged in a simple childlike way, being unconscious of any false shame.

Her whole heart was in her boy. She often feared that she loved him too much — more than God himself — yet she could not bear to pray to have her love for her child lessened. But she would kneel down by his little bed at night — at the deep, still midnight — with the stars that kept watch over Rizpah shining down upon her, and tell God what I have now told you, that she feared she loved her child too much, yet could not, would not, love him less; and speak to Him of her one treasure as she could speak to no earthly friend. And so, unconsciously, her love for her child led her up to love to God, to the All-knowing, who read her heart.

It might be superstition — I dare say it was — but, somehow, she never lay down to rest without saying, as she looked her last on her boy, "Thy will, not mine, be done;" and even while she trembled and shrunk with infinite dread from sounding the depths of what that will might be, she felt as if her treasure were more secure to waken up rosy and bright in the morning, as one over whose slumbers God's holy angels had watched, for the very words which she had turned away in sick terror from realising the night before.

Her daily absence at her duties to the Bradshaw

children only ministered to her love for Leonard. Everything does minister to love when its foundation lies deep in a true heart, and it was with an exquisite pang of delight that, after a moment of vague fear

> (Oh, mercy! to myself I said,
> If Lucy should be dead!),

she saw her child's bright face of welcome as he threw open the door every afternoon on her return home. For it was his silently-appointed work to listen for her knock, and rush breathless to let her in. If he were in the garden, or up-stairs among the treasures of the lumber-room, either Miss Benson, or her brother, or Sally, would fetch him to his happy little task; no one so sacred as he to the allotted duty. And the joyous meeting was not deadened by custom, to either mother or child.

Ruth gave the Bradshaws the highest satisfaction, as Mr. Bradshaw often said both to her and to the Bensons; indeed, she rather winced under his pompous approbation. But his favourite recreation was patronising; and when Ruth saw how quietly and meekly Mr. Benson submitted to gifts and praise, when an honest word of affection, or a tacit, implied acknowledgment of equality, would have been worth everything said and done, she tried to be more meek in spirit, and to recognise the good that undoubtedly existed in Mr. Bradshaw. He was richer and more prosperous than ever; — a keen, far-seeing man of business, with an undisguised contempt for all who failed in the success which he had achieved. But it *was not* alone those who were less fortunate in *obtaining* wealth than himself that he visited with

severity of judgment; every moral error or delinquency came under his unsparing comment. Stained by no vice himself, either in his own eyes or in that of any human being who cared to judge him, having nicely and wisely proportioned and adapted his means to his ends, he could afford to speak and act with a severity which was almost sanctimonious in its ostentation of thankfulness as to himself. Not a misfortune or a sin was brought to light but Mr. Bradshaw could trace it to its cause in some former mode of action, which he had long ago foretold would lead to shame. If another's son turned out wild or bad, Mr. Bradshaw had little sympathy; it might have been prevented by a stricter rule, or more religious life at home; young Richard Bradshaw was quiet and steady, and other fathers might have had sons like him if they had taken the same pains to enforce obedience. Richard was an only son, and yet Mr. Bradshaw might venture to say, he had never had his own way in his life. Mrs. Bradshaw was, he confessed (Mr. Bradshaw did not dislike confessing his wife's errors), rather less firm than he should have liked with the girls; and with some people, he believed, Jemima was rather headstrong; but to his wishes, she had always shown herself obedient. All children were obedient, if their parents were decided and authoritative; and every one would turn out well, if properly managed. If they did not prove good, they must take the consequences of their errors.

Mrs. Bradshaw murmured faintly at her husband when his back was turned; but if his voice was heard, or his *footsteps* sounded in the distance, she was *mute, and hurried* her children into the attitude or

action most pleasing to their father. Jemima, it is true, rebelled against this manner of proceeding, which savoured to her a little of deceit; but even she had not, as yet, overcome her awe of her father sufficiently to act independently of him, and according to her own sense of right — or, rather, I should say, according to her own warm, passionate impulses. Before him, the wilfulness which made her dark eyes blaze out at times was hushed and still; he had no idea of her self-tormenting, no notion of the almost southern jealousy which seemed to belong to her brunette complexion. Jemima was not pretty, the flatness and shortness of her face made her almost plain; yet most people looked twice at her expressive countenance, at the eyes which flamed or melted at every trifle, at the rich colour which came at every expressed emotion into her usually sallow face, at the faultless teeth which made her smile like a sunbeam. But then, again, when she thought she was not kindly treated, when a suspicion crossed her mind, or when she was angry with herself, her lips were tight-pressed together, her colour was wan and almost livid, and a stormy gloom clouded her eyes as with a film. But before her father her words were few, and he did not notice looks or tones.

Her brother Richard had been equally silent before his father, in boyhood and early youth; but since he had gone to be clerk in a London house, preparatory to assuming his place as junior partner in Mr. Bradshaw's business, he spoke more on his occasional visits at home. And very proper and *highly* moral was his conversation; set sentences of *goodness*, which were like the flowers that children

stick in the ground, and that have not sprang upwards from roots — deep down in the hidden life and experience of the heart. He was as severe a judge as his father of other people's conduct, but you felt that Mr. Bradshaw was sincere in his condemnation of all outward error and vice, and that he would try himself by the same laws as he tried others; somehow, Richard's words were frequently heard with a lurking distrust, and many shook their heads over the pattern son; but then it was those whose sons had gone astray, and been condemned, in no private or tender manner, by Mr. Bradshaw, so it might be revenge in them. Still, Jemima felt that all was not right; her heart sympathised in the rebellion against his father's commands, which her brother had confessed to her in an unusual moment of confidence, but her uneasy conscience condemned the deceit which he had practised.

The brother and sister were sitting alone over a blazing Christmas fire, and Jemima held an old newspaper in her hand to shield her face from the hot light. They were talking of family events, when, during a pause, Jemima's eye caught the name of a great actor, who had lately given prominence and life to a character in one of Shakspeare's plays. The criticism in the paper was fine, and warmed Jemima's heart.

"How I should like to see a play!" exclaimed she.

"Should you?" said her brother, listlessly.

"Yes, to be sure! Just hear this!" and she began to read a fine passage of criticism.

"Those *newspaper* people can make an article out *of anything," said* he, yawning. "I've seen the man

myself, and it was all very well, but nothing to make such a fuss about."

"You! you seen —! Have you seen a play, Richard? Oh, why did you never tell me before? Tell me all about it! Why did you never name seeing — in your letters?"

He half smiled, contemptuously enough. "Oh! at first it strikes one rather, but after a while one cares no more for the theatre than one does for mince-pies."

"Oh, I wish I might go to London!" said Jemima, impatiently. "I've a great mind to ask papa to let me go to the George Smiths', and then I could see —. I would not think him like mince-pies."

"You must not do any such thing!" said Richard, now neither yawning nor contemptuous. "My father would never allow you to go to the theatre; and the George Smiths are such old fogeys — they would be sure to tell."

"How do you go, then? Does my father give you leave?"

"Oh! many things are right for men which are not for girls."

Jemima sat and pondered. Richard wished he had not been so confidential.

"You need not name it," said he, rather anxiously.

"Name what?" said she, startled, for her thoughts had gone far a-field.

"Oh, name my going once or twice to the theatre!"

"No, I sha'n't name it!" said she. "No one here would care to hear it."

But it was with some little surprise, and almost *with a feeling* of disgust, that she heard Richard join

with her father in condemning some one, and add to Mr. Bradshaw's list of offences, by alleging that the young man was a play-goer. He did not think his sister heard his words.

Mary and Elizabeth were the two girls whom Ruth had in charge; they resembled Jemima more than their brother in character. The household rules were occasionally a little relaxed in their favour, for Mary, the elder, was nearly eight years younger than Jemima, and three intermediate children had died. They loved Ruth dearly, made a great pet of Leonard, and had many profound secrets together, most of which related to their wonders if Jemima and Mr. Farquhar would ever be married. They watched their sister closely; and every day had some fresh confidence to make to each other, confirming or discouraging to their hopes.

Ruth rose early, and shared the household work with Sally and Miss Benson, till seven; and then she helped Leonard to dress, and had a quiet time alone with him till prayers and breakfast. At nine she was to be at Mr. Bradshaw's house. She sat in the room with Mary and Elizabeth during the Latin, the writing, and arithmetic lessons, which they received from masters; then she read, and walked with them, they clinging to her as to an elder sister; she dined with her pupils at the family lunch, and reached home by four. That happy home — those quiet days!

And so the peaceful days passed on into weeks, and months, and years, and Ruth and Leonard grew and strengthened into the riper beauty of their respective ages; while as yet no touch of decay had *come on the quaint*, primitive elders of the household.

CHAPTER XX.

It was no wonder that the lookers-on were perplexed as to the state of affairs between Jemima and Mr. Farquhar, for they two were sorely puzzled themselves at the sort of relationship between them. Was it love, or was it not? that was the question in Mr. Farquhar's mind. He hoped it was not; he believed it was not; and yet he felt as if it were. There was something preposterous, he thought, in a man, nearly forty years of age, being in love with a girl of twenty. He had gone on reasoning through all the days of his manhood on the idea of a staid, noble-minded wife, grave and sedate, the fit companion in experience of her husband. He had spoken with admiration of reticent characters, full of self-control and dignity; and he hoped — he trusted, that all this time he had not been allowing himself unconsciously to fall in love with a wild-hearted, impetuous girl, who knew nothing of life beyond her father's house, and who chafed under the strict discipline enforced there. For it was rather a suspicious symptom of the state of Mr. Farquhar's affections, that he had discovered the silent rebellion which continued in Jemima's heart, unperceived by any of her own family, against the severe laws and opinions of her father. Mr. Farquhar shared in these opinions; but in him they were modified, and took a *milder form.* Still he approved of much that Mr. Bradshaw did and said; and this made it all the more

strange that he should wince so for Jemima, whenever anything took place which he instinctively knew that she would dislike. After an evening at Mr. Bradshaw's, when Jemima had gone to the very verge of questioning or disputing some of her father's severe judgments, Mr. Farquhar went home in a dissatisfied, restless state of mind, which he was almost afraid to analyse. He admired the inflexible integrity — and almost the pomp of principle — evinced by Mr. Bradshaw on every occasion; he wondered how it was that Jemima could not see how grand a life might be, whose every action was shaped in obedience to some eternal law; instead of which, he was afraid she rebelled against every law, and was only guided by impulse. Mr. Farquhar had been taught to dread impulses as promptings of the devil. Sometimes, if he tried to present her father's opinions before her in another form, so as to bring himself and her rather more into that state of agreement he longed for, she flashed out upon him with the indignation of difference that she dared not show to, or before, her father, as if she had some diviner instinct which taught her more truly than they knew, with all their experience; at least, in her first expressions there seemed something good and fine; but opposition made her angry and irritable, and the arguments which he was constantly provoking (whenever he was with her in her father's absence) frequently ended in some vehemence of expression on her part that offended Mr. Farquhar, who did not see how she expiated her anger in tears and self-reproaches when alone in her chamber. Then he would lecture himself severely on the interest he could not help feeling in a wilful girl; he would determine not

to interfere with her opinions in future, and yet, the very next time they differed, he strove to argue her into harmony with himself, in spite of all resolutions to the contrary.

Mr. Bradshaw saw just enough of this interest which Jemima had excited in his partner's mind, to determine him in considering their future marriage as a settled affair. The fitness of the thing had long ago struck him; her father's partner — so the fortune he meant to give her might continue in the business; a man of such steadiness of character, and such a capital eye for a desirable speculation as Mr. Farquhar — just the right age to unite the paternal with the conjugal affection, and consequently the very man for Jemima, who had something unruly in her, which might break out under a *régime* less wisely adjusted to the circumstances than was Mr. Bradshaw's (in his own opinion) — a house ready-furnished, at a convenient distance from her home — no near relations on Mr. Farquhar's side, who might be inclined to consider his residence as their own for an indefinite time, and so add to the household expenses — in short, what could be more suitable in every way? Mr. Bradshaw respected the very self-restraint he thought he saw in Mr. Farquhar's demeanour, attributing it to a wise desire to wait until trade should be rather more slack, and the man of business more at leisure to become the lover.

As for Jemima, at times she thought she almost hated Mr. Farquhar.

"What business has he," she would think, "to *lecture me*? Often I can hardly bear it from papa, and *I will not bear* it from him. He treats me just like a

ld, and as if I should lose all my present opinions
en I know more of the world. I am sure I should
e never to know the world, if it was to make me
nk as he does, hard man that he is! I wonder what
de him take Jem Brown on as gardener again, if he
es not believe that above one criminal in a thousand
restored to goodness. I'll ask him, some day, if
.t was not acting on impulse rather than principle.
or impulse! how you do get abused. But I will
. Mr. Farquhar, I will not let him interfere with
. If I do what papa bids me, no one has a right
notice whether I do it willingly or not."

So then she tried to defy Mr. Farquhar, by doing
l saying things that she knew he would disapprove.
e went so far that he was seriously grieved, and
not even remonstrate and "lecture," and then she
s disappointed and irritated; for, somehow, with all
indignation at interference, she liked to be lectured
him; not that she was aware of this liking of hers,
; still it would have been more pleasant to be
lded than so quietly passed over. Her two little
ers, with their wide-awake eyes, had long ago put
ıgs together, and conjectured. Every day they had
ne fresh mystery together, to be imparted in garden-
lks and whispered talks.

"Lizzie, did you see how the tears came into
nie's eyes when Mr. Farquhar looked so displeased
en she said good people were always dull? I think
's in love." Mary said the last words with grave
phasis, and felt like an oracle of twelve years
age.

"I don't," said Lizzie. "I know I cry often

enough when papa is cross, and I'm not in love with him."

"Yes! but you don't look as Mimie did."

"Don't call her Mimie — you know papa does like it."

"Yes; but there are so many things papa does like I can never remember them all. Never mind about that; but listen to something I've got to tell you, if you'll never, never tell."

"No, indeed I won't, Mary. What is it?"

"Not to Mrs. Denbigh?"

"No, not even to Mrs. Denbigh."

"Well, then, the other day — last Friday, Jemima ——"

"Jemima!" interrupted the more conscientious Elizabeth.

"Jemima, if it must be so," jerked out Mary, "sent me to her desk for an envelope, and what do you think I saw?"

"What?" asked Elizabeth, expecting nothing less than a red-hot Valentine, signed Walter Farquhar, Bradshaw, Farquhar, and Co., in full.

"Why, a piece of paper, with dull-looking lines upon it, just like the scientific dialogues; and I remembered all about it. It was once when Mr. Farquhar had been telling us that a bullet does not go in a straight line, but in a something curve, and he drew some lines on a piece of paper; and Mimie —"

"Jemima," put in Elizabeth.

"Well, well! she had treasured it up, and wrote *in a corner*, 'W. F., April 3rd.' Now, that's rather *like love*, is not it? For Jemima hates useful info

on just as much as I do, and that's saying a great eal; and yet she had kept this paper, and dated it."

"If that's all, I know Dick keeps a paper with liss Benson's name written on it, and yet he's not ı love with her; and perhaps Jemima may like Mr. arquhar, and he may not like her. It seems such little while since her hair was turned up, and he as always been a grave middle-aged man ever since can recollect; and then, have you never noticed ow often he finds fault with her — almost lectures er?"

"To be sure," said Mary; "but he may be in ve, for all that. Just think how often papa lectures amma; and yet, of course, they're in love with each ther."

"Well! we shall see," said Elizabeth.

Poor Jemima little thought of the four sharp eyes at watched her daily course while she sat alone, as he fancied, with her secret in her own room. For, ı a passionate fit of grieving, at the impatient hasty mper which had made her so seriously displease Mr. arquhar that he had gone away without remonstrance, ithout more leave-taking than a distant bow, she had egun to suspect that rather than not be noticed at ll by him, rather than be an object of indifference to im — oh! far rather would she be an object of anger ad upbraiding; and the thoughts that followed this onfession to herself, stunned and bewildered her; and r once that they made her dizzy with hope, ten times ey made her sick with fear. For an instant she lanned to become and to be all he could wish her; change her very nature for him. And then a great *sh of pride* came over her, and she set her teeth

tight together, and determined that he should either love her as she was, or not at all. Unless he could take her with all her faults, she would not care for his regard; "love" was too noble a word to call such cold calculating feeling as his must be, who went about with a pattern idea in his mind, trying to find a wife to match. Besides, there was something degrading, Jemima thought, in trying to alter herself to gain the love of any human creature. And yet, if he did not care for her, if this late indifference were to last, what a great shroud was drawn over life! Could she bear it?

From the agony she dared not look at, but which she was going to risk encountering, she was aroused by the presence of her mother.

"Jemima! your father wants to speak to you in the dining-room."

"What for?" asked the girl.

"Oh! he is fidgeted by something Mr. Farquhar said to me, and which I repeated. I am sure I thought there was no harm in it, and your father always likes me to tell him what everybody says in his absence."

Jemima went with a heavy heart into her father's presence.

He was walking up and down the room, and did not see her at first.

"Oh, Jemima! is that you? Has your mother told you what I want to speak to you about?"

"No!" said Jemima. "Not exactly."

"She has been telling me, what proves to me how very seriously you must have displeased and offended Mr. Farquhar, before he could have expressed himself

her as he did, when he left the house; you know hat he said?"

"No!" said Jemima, her heart swelling within her. He has no right to say anything about me." She as desperate, or she durst not have said this before r father.

"No right! — what do you mean, Jemima?" said r. Bradshaw, turning sharp round. "Surely you ust know that I hope he may one day be your hus- nd; that is to say, if you prove yourself worthy of e excellent training I have given you. I cannot ppose Mr. Farquhar would take any undisciplined rl as a wife."

Jemima held tight by a chair near which she was anding. She did not speak; her father was pleased r her silence — it was the way in which he liked s projects to be received.

"But you cannot suppose," he continued, "that r. Farquhar will consent to marry you —"

"Consent to marry me!" repeated Jemima, in a w tone of brooding indignation; were those the rms upon which her rich, woman's heart was to be ven, with a calm consent of acquiescent acceptance, it a little above resignation on the part of the re- iver?

— "if you give way to a temper which, although ou have never dared to show it to me, I am well vare exists, although I hoped the habits of self-exa- ination I had instilled had done much to cure you manifesting it. At one time, Richard promised to the more headstrong of the two; now, I must de- re you to take pattern by him. Yes," he continued, lling into his old train of thought, "it would be a

most fortunate connexion for you in every way. I should have you under my own eye, and could still assist you in the formation of your character, and I should be at hand to strengthen and confirm your principles. Mr. Farquhar's connexion with the firm would be convenient and agreeable to me in a pecuniary point of view. He —" Mr. Bradshaw was going on in his enumeration of the advantages which he in particular, and Jemima in the second place would derive from this marriage, when his daughter spoke, at first so low that he could not hear her, as he walked up and down the room with his creaking boots, and he had to stop to listen.

"Has Mr. Farquhar ever spoken to you about it?" Jemima's cheek was flushed as she asked the question she wished that she might have been the person to whom he had first addressed himself.

Mr. Bradshaw answered,

"No! not spoken. It has been implied between us for some time. At least, I have been so aware of his intentions that I have made several allusions, in the course of business, to it, as a thing that might take place. He can hardly have misunderstood; he must have seen that I perceived his design, and approved of it," said Mr. Bradshaw, rather doubtfully; as he remembered how very little, in fact, passed between him and his partner which could have reference to the subject, to any but a mind prepared to receive it. Perhaps Mr. Farquhar had not really thought of it; but then again, that would imply that his own penetration *had been* mistaken, a thing not impossible certainly *but quite* beyond the range of probability. So he

assured himself, and (as he thought) his daughter, by saying,

"The whole thing is so suitable — the advantages arising from the connexion are so obvious; besides which, I am quite aware, from many little speeches of Mr. Farquhar's, that he contemplates marriage at no very distant time; and he seldom leaves Eccleston, and visits few families besides our own — certainly, none that can compare with ours in the advantages you have all received in moral and religious training." But then Mr. Bradshaw was checked in his implied praises of himself (and only himself could be his martingale when he once set out on such a career), by a recollection that Jemima must not feel too secure, as she might become if he dwelt too much on the advantages of her being her father's daughter. Accordingly, he said: "But you must be aware, Jemima, that you do very little credit to the education I have given you, when you make such an impression as you must have done to-day, before Mr. Farquhar could have said what he did of you!"

"What did he say?" asked Jemima, still in the low, husky tone of suppressed anger.

"Your mother says he remarked to her, 'What a pity it is, that Jemima cannot maintain her opinions without going into a passion; and what a pity it is, that her opinions are such as to sanction, rather than curb, these fits of rudeness and anger!'"

"Did he say that?" said Jemima, in a still lower tone, not questioning her father, but speaking rather to herself.

"I have *no* doubt he did," replied her father, *gravely*. "*Your* mother is in the habit of repeating

accurately to me what takes place in my absence; besides which, the whole speech is not one of hers; she has not altered a word in the repetition, I am convinced. I have trained her to habits of accuracy very unusual in a woman."

At another time, Jemima might have been inclined to rebel against this system of carrying constant intelligence to head-quarters, which she had long ago felt as an insurmountable obstacle to any free communication with her mother; but now, her father's means of acquiring knowledge faded into insignificance before the nature of the information he imparted. She stood quite still, grasping the chair-back, longing to be dismissed.

"I have said enough now, I hope, to make you behave in a becoming manner to Mr. Farquhar; if your temper is too unruly to be always under your own control, at least have respect to my injunctions, and take some pains to curb it before him."

"May I go?" asked Jemima, chafing more and more.

"You may," said her father. When she left the room he gently rubbed his hands together, satisfied with the effect he had produced, and wondering how it was, that one so well brought up as his daughter, could ever say or do anything to provoke such a remark from Mr. Farquhar as that which he had heard repeated.

"Nothing can be more gentle and docile than she is when spoken to in the proper manner. I must give Farquhar a hint," said Mr. Bradshaw to himself.

Jemima rushed up-stairs, and locked herself into *her room.* She began pacing up and down at first,

without shedding a tear; but then she suddenly stopped, and burst out crying with passionate indignation.

"So! I am to behave well, not because it is right — not because it is right — but to show off before Mr. Farquhar. Oh, Mr. Farquhar!" said she, suddenly changing to a sort of upbraiding tone of voice, "I did not think so of you an hour ago. I did not think you could choose a wife in that cold-hearted way, though you did profess to act by rule and line; but you think to have me, do you? because it is fitting and suitable, and you want to be married, and can't spare time for wooing" (she was lashing herself up by an exaggeration of all her father had said). "And how often I have thought you were too grand for me! but now I know better. Now I can believe that all you do is done from calculation; you are good because it adds to your business credit — you talk in that high strain about principle because it sounds well, and is respectable — and even these things are better than your cold way of looking out for a wife, just as you would do for a carpet, to add to your comforts, and settle you respectably. But I won't be that wife. You shall see something of me which shall make you not acquiesce so quietly in the arrangements of the firm." She cried too vehemently to go on thinking or speaking. Then she stopped, and said:

"Only an hour ago I was hoping — I don't know what I was hoping — but I thought — oh! how I was deceived! — I thought he had a true, deep, loving, manly heart, which God might let me win; but now I know he has only a calm, calculating head —"

If Jemima had been vehement and passionate *before this conversation* with her father, it was better

than the sullen reserve she assumed now whenever Mr. Farquhar came to the house. He felt it deeply; no reasoning with himself took off the pain he experienced. He tried to speak on the subjects she liked, in the manner she liked, until he despised himself for the unsuccessful efforts.

He stood between her and her father once or twice, in obvious inconsistency with his own previously-expressed opinions; and Mr. Bradshaw piqued himself upon his admirable management, in making Jemima feel that she owed his indulgence or forbearance to Mr. Farquhar's interference; but Jemima — perverse, miserable Jemima — thought that she hated Mr. Farquhar all the more. She respected her father inflexible, much more than her father pompously giving up to Mr. Farquhar's subdued remonstrances on her behalf. Even Mr. Bradshaw was perplexed, and shut himself up to consider how Jemima was to be made more fully to understand his wishes and her own interests. But there was nothing to take hold of as a ground for any further conversation with her. Her actions were so submissive that they were spiritless; she did all her father desired; she did it with a nervous quickness and haste, if she thought otherwise Mr. Farquhar would interfere in any way. She wished evidently to owe nothing to him. She had begun by leaving the room when he came in, after the conversation she had had with her father; but at Mr. Bradshaw's first expression of his wish that she should remain, she remained — silent, indifferent, inattentive to all that was going on; at least there was this appearance of inattention. She would work away at her sewing as if she were to earn her livelihood by it; the light was gone out of her

eyes as she lifted them up heavily before replying to any question, and the eyelids were often swollen with crying.

But in all this there was no positive fault. Mr. Bradshaw could not have told her not to do this, or to do that, without her doing it; for she had become much more docile of late.

It was a wonderful proof of the influence Ruth had gained in the family, that Mr. Bradshaw, after much deliberation, congratulated himself on the wise determination he had made of requesting her to speak to Jemima, and find out what feeling was at the bottom of all this change in her ways of going on.

He rang the bell.

"Is Mrs. Denbigh here?" he inquired of the servant who answered it.

"Yes, Sir; she is just come."

"Beg her to come to me in this room as soon as she can leave the young ladies."

Ruth came.

"Sit down, Mrs. Denbigh, sit down. I want to have a little conversation with you; not about your pupils, they are going on well under your care, I am sure; and I often congratulate myself on the choice I made — I assure you I do. But now I want to speak to you about Jemima. She is very fond of you, and perhaps you could take some opportunity of observing to her — in short, of saying to her, that she is behaving very foolishly — in fact, disgusting Mr. Farquhar (who was, I know, inclined to like her) by the sullen, sulky way she behaves in, when he is by."

He paused for the ready acquiescence he expected. But Ruth did not quite comprehend what was required

of her, and disliked the glimpse she had gained of the task very much.

"I hardly understand, Sir. You are displeased with Miss Bradshaw's manners to Mr. Farquhar."

"Well, well! not quite that; I am displeased with her manners — they are sulky and abrupt, particularly when he is by — and I want you (of whom she is so fond) to speak to her about it."

"But I have never had the opportunity of noticing them. Whenever I have seen her, she has been most gentle and affectionate."

"But I think you do not hesitate to believe me, when I say that I have noticed the reverse," said Mr. Bradshaw, drawing himself up.

"No, Sir. I beg your pardon if I have expressed myself so badly as to seem to doubt. But am I to tell Miss Bradshaw that you have spoken of her faults to me?" asked Ruth, a little astonished, and shrinking more than ever from the proposed task.

"If you would allow me to finish what I have got to say, without interruption, I could then tell you what I do wish."

"I beg your pardon, Sir," said Ruth, gently.

"I wish you to join our circle occasionally in an evening; Mrs. Bradshaw shall send you an invitation when Mr. Farquhar is likely to be here. Warned by me, and, consequently, with your observation quickened, you can hardly fail to notice instances of what I have pointed out; and then I will trust to your own good sense" (Mr. Bradshaw bowed to her at this part of his sentence) "to find an opportunity to remonstrate with her."

Ruth was beginning to speak, but he waved his hand for another minute of silence.

"Only a minute, Mrs. Denbigh; I am quite aware that, in requesting your presence occasionally in the evening, I shall be trespassing upon the time which is, in fact, your money; you may be assured that I shall not forget this little circumstance, and you can explain what I have said on this head to Benson and his sister."

"I am afraid I cannot do it," Ruth began: but while she was choosing words delicate enough to express her reluctance to act as he wished, he had almost bowed her out of the room; and thinking that she was modest in her estimate of her qualifications for remonstrating with his daughter, he added, blandly,

"No one so able, Mrs. Denbigh. I have observed many qualities in you — observed when, perhaps, you have little thought it."

If he had observed Ruth that morning, he would have seen an absence of mind, and depression of spirits, not much to her credit as a teacher; for she could not bring herself to feel, that she had any right to go into the family purposely to watch over and find fault with any one member of it. If she had seen anything wrong in Jemima, Ruth loved her so much that she would have told her of it in private; and with many doubts, how far she was the one to pull out the mote from any one's eye, even in the most tender manner; — she would have had to conquer reluctance before she could have done even this; but there was something undefinably repugnant to her in the manner of acting which Mr. Bradshaw had proposed, and she determined not to accept

the invitations which were to place her in so false a position.

But as she was leaving the house, after the end of the lessons, while she stood in the hall tying on her bonnet, and listening to the last small confidences of her two pupils, she saw Jemima coming in through the garden-door, and was struck by the change in her looks. The large eyes, so brilliant once, were dim and clouded; the complexion sallow and colourless; a lowering expression was on the dark brow, and the corners of her mouth drooped as with sorrowful thoughts. She looked up, and her eyes met Ruth's.

"Oh! you beautiful creature!" thought Jemima, "with your still, calm, heavenly face, what are you to know of earth's trials? You have lost your beloved by death — but that is a blessed sorrow; the sorrow I have pulls me down and down, and makes me despise and hate every one — not you, though." And her face changing to a soft, tender look, she went up to Ruth, and kissed her fondly; as if it were a relief to be near some one on whose true pure heart she relied. Ruth returned the caress; and even while she did so, she suddenly rescinded her resolution to keep clear of what Mr. Bradshaw had desired her to do. On her way home she resolved, if she could, to find out what were Jemima's secret feelings; and if (as from some previous knowledge she suspected) they were morbid and exaggerated in any way, to try and help her right with all the wisdom which true love gives. It was time that some one should come to still the storm in Jemima's turbulent heart, which was daily and hourly *knowing* less and less of peace. The irritating difficulty was to separate the two characters, which at two

different times she had attributed to Mr. Farquhar — the old one, which she had formerly believed to be true, that he was a man acting up to a high standard of lofty principle, and acting up without a struggle (and this last had been the circumstance which had made her rebellious and irritable once); the new one, which her father had excited in her suspicious mind, that Mr. Farquhar was cold and calculating in all he did, and that she was to be transferred by the former, and accepted by the latter, as a sort of stock in trade — these were the two Mr. Farquhars who clashed together in her mind. And in this state of irritation and prejudice, she could not bear the way in which he gave up his opinions to please her; that was not the way to win her; she liked him far better when he inflexibly and rigidly adhered to his idea of right and wrong, not even allowing any force to temptation, and hardly any grace to repentance, compared with that beauty of holiness which had never yielded to sin. He had been her idol in those days, as she found out now, however much at the time she had opposed him with violence.

As for Mr. Farquhar, he was almost weary of himself; no reasoning, even no principle, seemed to have influence over him, for he saw that Jemima was not at all what he approved of in woman. He saw her uncurbed and passionate, affecting to despise the rules of life he held most sacred, and indifferent to, if not positively disliking him; and yet he loved her dearly. But he resolved to make a great effort of will, and break loose from these trammels of sense. And while he resolved, some old recollection would bring her up, *hanging on his* arm, in all the confidence of early girl-

hood, looking up in his face with her soft dark eyes and questioning him upon the mysterious subject which had so much interest for both of them at that time, although they had become only matter for dissension in these later days.

It was also true, as Mr. Bradshaw had said, Mr Farquhar wished to marry, and had not much choice in the small town of Eccleston. He never put this so plainly before himself, as a reason for choosing Jemima, as her father had done to her; but it was an unconscious motive all the same. However, now he had lectured himself into the resolution to make a pretty long absence from Eccleston, and see if, amongst his distant friends, there was no woman more in accordance with his ideal, who could put the naughty wilful, plaguing Jemima Bradshaw out of his head, if he did not soon perceive some change in her for the better.

A few days after Ruth's conversation with Mr Bradshaw, the invitation she had been expecting, yet dreading, came. It was to her alone. Mr. and Mrs Benson were pleased at the compliment to her, and urged her acceptance of it. She wished that they had been included; she had not thought it right, or kind to Jemima, to tell them why she was going, and feared now lest they should feel a little hurt that they were not asked too. But she need not have been afraid. They were glad and proud of the attention to her, and never thought of themselves.

"Ruthie, what gown shall you wear to-night? your dark grey one, I suppose?" asked Miss Benson.

"*Yes, I suppose so. I never thought of it; that is my best.*"

"Well, then, I shall quill up a ruff for you. You now I am a famous quiller of net."

Ruth came down-stairs with a little flush on her cheeks when she was ready to go. She held her bonnet and shawl in her hand, for she knew Miss Benson and Sally would want to see her dressed.

"Is not mamma pretty?" asked Leonard, with a child's pride.

"She looks very nice and tidy," said Miss Benson, who had an idea that children should not talk or think about beauty.

I think my ruff looks so nice," said Ruth, with gentle pleasure. And indeed it did look nice, and set off the pretty round throat most becomingly. Her hair, now grown long and thick, was smoothed as close to her head as its waving nature would allow, and plaited up in a great rich knot low down behind. The grey gown was as plain as plain could be.

"You should have light gloves, Ruth," said Miss Benson. She went up-stairs, and brought down a delicate pair of Limerick ones, which had been long treasured up in a walnut-shell.

"They say them gloves is made of chicken's-skins," said Sally, examining them curiously. "I wonder how they set about skinning 'em."

"Here, Ruth," said Mr. Benson, coming in from the garden, "here's a rose or two for you. I am sorry there are no more; I hoped I should have had my yellow rose out by this time, but the damask and the white are in a warmer corner, and have got the start."

Miss Benson and Leonard stood at the door, and watched her down the little passage-street till she was out of sight.

She had hardly touched the bell at Mr. Bradshaw's door, when Mary and Elizabeth opened it with boisterous glee.

"We saw you coming — we've been watching for you — we want you to come round the garden before tea; papa is not come in yet. Do come."

She went round the garden with a little girl clinging to each arm. It was full of sunshine and flowers, and this made the contrast between it and the usual large family room (which fronted the north-east, and therefore had no evening sun to light up its cold drab furniture) more striking than usual. It looked very gloomy. There was the great dining-table, heavy and square; the range of chairs, straight and square; the work-boxes, useful and square; the colouring of walls, and carpet, and curtains, all of the coldest description; everything was handsome, and everything was ugly. Mrs. Bradshaw was asleep in her easy-chair when they came in. Jemima had just put down her work, and, lost in thought, she leant her cheek on her hand. When she saw Ruth she brightened a little, and went to her and kissed her. Mrs. Bradshaw jumped up at the sound of their entrance, and was wide awake in a moment.

"Oh! I thought your father was here," said she, evidently relieved to find that he had not come in and caught her sleeping.

"Thank you, Mrs. Denbigh, for coming to us to-night," said she, in the quiet tone in which she generally spoke in her husband's absence. When he was there, a sort of constant terror of displeasing *him made* her voice sharp and nervous; the children *knew that* many a thing passed over by their mother

when their father was away, was sure to be noticed by her when he was present; and noticed, too, in a cross and querulous manner, for she was so much afraid of the blame which on any occasion of their misbehaviour fell upon her. And yet she looked up to her husband with a reverence, and regard, and a faithfulness of love, which his decision of character was likely to produce on a weak and anxious mind. He was a rest and a support to her, on whom she cast all her responsibilities; she was an obedient, unremonstrating wife to him; no stronger affection had ever brought her duty to him into conflict with any desire of her heart. She loved her children dearly, though they all perplexed her very frequently. Her son was her especial darling, because he very seldom brought her into any scrapes with his father; he was so cautious and prudent, and had the art of "keeping a calm sough" about any difficulty he might be in. With all her dutiful sense of the obligation, which her husband enforced upon her, to notice and tell him everything that was going wrong in the household, and especially among his children, Mrs. Bradshaw, somehow, contrived to be honestly blind to a good deal that was not praiseworthy in Master Richard.

Mr. Bradshaw came in before long, bringing with him Mr. Farquhar. Jemima had been talking to Ruth with some interest before then; but, on seeing Mr. Farquhar, she bent her head down over her work, went a little paler, and turned obstinately silent. Mr. Bradshaw longed to command her to speak; *but even* he had a suspicion that what she *might say, when* so commanded, might be rather

worse in its effect than her gloomy silence; so he held his peace, and a discontented, angry kind of peace it was. Mrs. Bradshaw saw that something was wrong, but could not tell what; only she became every moment more trembling, and nervous, and irritable, and sent Mary and Elizabeth off on all sorts of contradictory errands to the servants, and made the tea twice as strong, and sweetened it twice as much as usual, in hopes of pacifying her husband with good things.

Mr. Farquhar had gone for the last time, or so he thought. He had resolved (for the fifth time) that he would go and watch Jemima once more, and if her temper got the better of her, and she showed the old sullenness again, and gave the old proofs of indifference to his good opinion, he would give her up altogether, and seek a wife elsewhere. He sat watching her with folded arms, and in silence. Altogether they were a pleasant family party!

Jemima wanted to wind a skein of wool. Mr. Farquhar saw it, and came to her, anxious to do her this little service. She turned away pettishly, and asked Ruth to hold it for her.

Ruth was hurt for Mr. Farquhar, and looked sorrowfully at Jemima; but Jemima would not see her glance of upbraiding, as Ruth, hoping that she would relent, delayed a little to comply with her request. Mr. Farquhar did; and went back to his seat to watch them both. He saw Jemima turbulent and stormy in look; he saw Ruth, to all appearance, heavenly calm as the angels, or with only that little *tinge of sorrow* which her friend's behaviour had called forth. He saw the unusual beauty of her low

and form, which he had never noticed before; and he saw Jemima, with all the brilliancy she once possessed in eyes and complexion, dimmed and faded. He watched Ruth, speaking low and soft to the little girls, who seemed to come to her in every difficulty; and he remarked her gentle firmness when their bedtime came, and they pleaded to stay up longer (their father was absent in his counting-house, or they would not have dared to do so). He liked Ruth's soft, distinct, unwavering "No! you must go. You must keep to what is right," far better than the good-natured yielding to entreaty he had formerly admired in Jemima. He was wandering off into this comparison, while Ruth, with delicate and unconscious tact, was trying to lead Jemima into some subject which should take her away from the thoughts, whatever they were, that made her so ungracious and rude.

Jemima was ashamed of herself before Ruth, in a way which she had never been before any one else. She valued Ruth's good opinion so highly, that she dreaded lest her friend should perceive her faults. She put a check upon herself — a check at first; but after a little time she had forgotten something of her trouble, and listened to Ruth, and questioned her about Leonard, and smiled at his little witticisms; and only the sighs, that would come up from the very force of habit, brought back the consciousness of her unhappiness. Before the end of the evening, Jemima had allowed herself to speak to Mr. Farquhar in the old way — questioning, differing, disputing. She was recalled to the remembrance of that miserable conversation by the entrance of her father. After that

she was silent. But he had seen her face more animated, and bright with a smile, as she spoke to Mr. Farquhar; and although he regretted the loss of her complexion (for she was still very pale), he was highly pleased with the success of his project. He never doubted but that Ruth had given her some sort of private exhortation to behave better. He could not have understood the pretty art with which, by simply banishing unpleasant subjects, and throwing a wholesome natural sunlit tone over others, Ruth had insensibly drawn Jemima out of her gloom. He resolved to buy Mrs. Denbigh a handsome silk gown the very next day. He did not believe she had a silk gown, poor creature! He had noticed that dark grey stuff, this long long time, as her Sunday dress. He liked the colour; the silk one should be just the same tinge. Then he thought that it would, perhaps, be better to choose a lighter shade, one which might be noticed as different to the old gown. For he had no doubt she would like to have it remarked, and, perhaps, would not object to tell people that it was a present from Mr. Bradshaw — a token of his approbation. He smiled a little to himself as he thought of this additional source of pleasure to Ruth. She, in the mean time, was getting up to go home. While Jemima was lighting the bed-candle at the lamp, Ruth came round to bid good night. Mr. Bradshaw could not allow her to remain till the morrow, uncertain whether he was satisfied or not.

"Good night, Mrs. Denbigh," said he. "Good *night*. Thank you. I am obliged to you — I am *exceedingly* obliged to you."

He laid emphasis on these words, for he was

pleased to see Mr. Farquhar step forwards to help Jemima in her little office.

Mr. Farquhar offered to accompany Ruth home; but the streets that intervened between Mr. Bradshaw's and the Chapel-house were so quiet that he desisted, when he learnt from Ruth's manner how much she disliked his proposal. Mr. Bradshaw, too, instantly observed:

"Oh! Mrs Denbigh need not trouble you, Farquhar. I have servants at liberty at any moment to attend on her, if she wishes it."

In fact, he wanted to make hay while the sun shone, and to detain Mr. Farquhar a little longer, now that Jemima was so gracious. She went upstairs with Ruth to help her to put on her things.

"Dear Jemima!" said Ruth, "I am so glad to see you looking better to-night! You quite frightened me this morning, you looked so ill."

"Did I?" replied Jemima. "Oh, Ruth! I have been so unhappy lately. I want you to come and put me to-rights," she continued, half smiling. "You know I'm a sort of out-pupil of yours, though we are so nearly of an age. You ought to lecture me, and make me good."

"Should I, dear?" said Ruth. "I don't think I'm the one to do it."

"Oh, yes! you are — you've done me good to-night."

"Well, if I can do anything for you, tell me what it is?" asked Ruth, tenderly.

"Oh, not now — not now," replied Jemima. "I could *not tell you* here. It's a long story, and I *don't know that I* can tell you at all. Mamma might

come up at any moment, and papa would be sure to ask what we had been talking about so long."

"Take your own time, love," said Ruth; "only remember, as far as I can, how glad I am to help you."

"You're too good, my darling!" said Jemima, fondly.

"Don't say so," replied Ruth, earnestly, almost as if she were afraid. "God knows I am not."

"Well! we're none of us too good," answered Jemima; "I know that. But you *are* very good. Nay, I won't call you so, if it makes you look so miserable. But come away down-stairs."

With the fragrance of Ruth's sweetness lingering about her, Jemima was her best self during the next half hour. Mr. Bradshaw was more and more pleased, and raised the price of the silk, which he was going to give Ruth, sixpence a yard during the time. Mr. Farquhar went home through the garden-way, happier than he had been this long time. He even caught himself humming the old refrain:

> On revient, on revient toujours,
> A ses premiers amours.

But as soon as he was aware of what he was doing, he cleared away the remnants of the song into a cough, which was sonorous, if not perfectly real.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE next morning, as Jemima and her mother sat at their work, it came into the head of the former to remember her father's very marked way of thanking Ruth the evening before.

"What a favourite Mrs. Denbigh is with papa," said she. "I am sure I don't wonder at it. Did you notice, Mamma, how he thanked her for coming here last night?"

"Yes, dear; but I don't think it was all —" Mrs. Bradshaw stopped short. She was never certain if it was right or wrong to say anything.

"Not all what?" asked Jemima, when she saw her mother was not going to finish the sentence.

"Not all because Mrs. Denbigh came to tea here," replied Mrs. Bradshaw.

"Why, what else could he be thanking her for? What has she done?" asked Jemima, stimulated to curiosity by her mother's hesitating manner.

"I don't know if I ought to tell you," said Mrs. Bradshaw.

"Oh, very well!" said Jemima, rather annoyed.

"Nay, dear! your papa never said I was not to tell; perhaps I may."

"Never mind! I don't want to hear," in a piqued tone.

There was silence for a little while. Jemima was *trying to think of* something else, but her thoughts

would revert to the wonder what Mrs. Denbigh could have done for her father.

"I think I may tell you, though," said Mrs. Bradshaw, half questioning.

Jemima had the honour not to urge any confidence, but she was too curious to take any active step towards repressing it.

Mrs. Bradshaw went on. "I think you deserve to know. It is partly your doing that papa is so pleased with Mrs. Denbigh. He is going to buy her a silk gown this morning, and I think you ought to know why."

"Why?" asked Jemima.

"Because papa is so pleased to find that you mind what she says."

"I mind what she says! to be sure I do, and always did. But why should papa give her a gown for that? I think he ought to give it me rather," said Jemima, half laughing.

"I am sure he would, dear; he will give you one, I am certain, if you want one. He was so pleased to see you like your old self to Mr. Farquhar last night. We neither of us could think what had come over you this last month; but now all seems right."

A dark cloud came over Jemima's face. She did not like this close observation and constant comment upon her manners; and what had Ruth to do with it?

"I am glad you were pleased," said she, very coldly. Then, after a pause, she added, "But you have not told me what Mrs. Denbigh had to do with my good behaviour."

"*Did* not she speak to you about it?" asked Mrs. *Bradshaw*, looking up.

"No; why should she. She has no right to criicise what I do. She would not be so impertinent," aid Jemima, feeling very uncomfortable and susicious.

"Yes, love! she would have had a right, for papa ıad desired her to do it."

"Papa desired her! What do you mean, Mamma?"

"Oh, dear! I dare say I should not have told ·ou," said Mrs. Bradshaw, perceiving, from Jemima's one of voice, that something had gone wrong. "Only ·ou spoke as if it would be impertinent in Mrs. Denigh, and I am sure she would not do anything that vas impertinent. You know, it would be but right or her to do what papa told her; and he said a great leal to her, the other day, about finding out why you vere so cross, and bringing you right. And you are ight now, dear!" said Mrs. Bradshaw, soothingly, hinking that Jemima was annoyed (like a good child) .t the recollection of how naughty she had been.

"Then papa is going to give Mrs. Denbigh a gown ıecause I was civil to Mr. Farquhar last night."

"Yes, dear!" said Mrs. Bradshaw, more and more rightened at Jemima's angry manner of speaking — ow-toned, but very indignant.

Jemima remembered, with smouldered anger, Ruth's ıleading way of wiling her from her sullenness the ıight before. Management everywhere! but in this ıase it was peculiarly revolting; so much so, that she ıould hardly bear to believe that the seemingly-transıarent Ruth had lent herself to it.

"Are you sure, Mamma, that papa asked Mrs. Den*ıigh to make me* behave differently? It seems so *range.*"

"I am quite sure. He spoke to her last Friday morning in the study. I remember it was Friday, because Mrs. Dean was working here."

Jemima remembered now that she had gone into the school-room on the Friday, and found her sisters lounging about, and wondering what papa could possibly want with Mrs. Denbigh.

After this conversation, Jemima repulsed all Ruth's timid efforts to ascertain the cause of her disturbance, and to help her if she could. Ruth's tender, sympathising manner, as she saw Jemima daily looking more wretched, was distasteful to the latter in the highest degree. She could not say that Mrs. Denbigh's conduct was positively wrong — it might even be quite right; but it was inexpressibly repugnant to her to think of her father consulting with a stranger (a week ago she almost considered Ruth as a sister) how to manage his daughter, so as to obtain the end he wished for; yes, even if that end was for her own good.

She was thankful and glad to see a brown-paper parcel lying on the hall-table, with a note in Ruth's handwriting, addressed to her father. She *knew* what it was, the grey silk dress. That she was sure Ruth would never accept.

No one henceforward could induce Jemima to enter into conversation with Mr. Farquhar. She suspected manœuvring in the simplest actions, and was miserable in this constant state of suspicion. She would not allow herself to like Mr. Farquhar, even when he said *things* the most after her own heart. She heard him, *one evening*, talking with her father about the *principles of trade*. Her father stood out for the keenest,

sharpest work, consistent with honesty; if he had not been her father she would, perhaps, have thought some of his sayings inconsistent with true Christian honesty. He was for driving hard bargains, exacting interest and payment of just bills to a day. That was (he said) the only way in which trade could be conducted. Once allow a margin of uncertainty, or where feelings, instead of maxims, were to be the guide, and all hope of there ever being any good men of business was ended.

"Suppose a delay of a month in requiring payment, might save a man's credit — prevent his becoming a bankrupt?" put in Mr. Farquhar.

"I would not give it him. I would let him have money to set up again as soon as he had passed the Bankruptcy Court; if he never passed, I might, in some cases, make him an allowance, but I would always keep my justice and my charity separate."

"And yet charity (in your sense of the word) degrades; justice, tempered with mercy and consideration, elevates."

"That is not justice — justice is certain and inflexible. No! Mr. Farquhar, you must not allow any Quixotic notions to mingle with your conduct as a tradesman."

And so they went on; Jemima's face glowing with sympathy in all Mr. Farquhar said; till once, on looking up suddenly with sparkling eyes, she saw a glance of her father's which told her, as plain as words could say, that he was watching the effect of Mr. Farquhar's speeches upon his daughter. She was chilled thenceforward; *she thought* her father prolonged the argument, *in order to call out* those sentiments which he knew

would most recommend his partner to his daughter. She would so fain have let herself love Mr. Farquhar; but this constant manœuvring, in which she did not feel clear that he did not take a passive part, made her sick at heart. She even wished that they might not go through the form of pretending to try to gain her consent to the marriage, if it involved all this premeditated action and speech-making — such moving about of every one into their right places, like pieces at chess. She felt as if she would rather be bought openly, like an Oriental daughter, where no one is degraded in their own eyes by being parties to such a contract. The consequences of all this "admirable management" of Mr. Bradshaw's would have been very unfortunate to Mr. Farquhar (who was innocent of all connivance in any of the plots — indeed, would have been as much annoyed at them as Jemima, had he been aware of them), but that the impression made upon him by Ruth on the evening I have so lately described, was deepened by the contrast which her behaviour made to Miss Bradshaw's on one or two more recent occasions.

There was no use, he thought, in continuing attentions so evidently distasteful to Jemima. To her, a young girl hardly out of the school-room, he probably appeared like an old man; and he might even lose the friendship with which she used to regard him, and which was, and ever would be, very dear to him, if he persevered in trying to be considered as a lover. He should always feel affectionately towards her; her very faults gave her an interest in his eyes, for which he had blamed *himself most* conscientiously and most uselessly when *he was looking* upon her as his future wife, but which

the said conscience would learn to approve of when she sank down to the place of a young friend, over whom he might exercise a good and salutary interest. Mrs. Denbigh, if not many months older in years, had known sorrow and cares so early that she was much older in character. Besides, her shy reserve, and her quiet daily walk within the lines of duty, were much in accordance with Mr. Farquhar's notion of what a wife should be. Still, it was a wrench to take his affections away from Jemima. If she had not helped him to do so by every means in her power, he could never have accomplished it.

Yes! by every means in her power had Jemima alienated her lover, her beloved — for so he was in fact. And now her quick-sighted eyes saw he was gone for ever — past recal; for did not her jealous, sore heart feel, even before he himself was conscious of the fact, that he was drawn towards sweet, lovely, composed, and dignified Ruth — one who always thought before she spoke (as Mr. Farquhar used to bid Jemima do) — who never was tempted by sudden impulse, but walked the world calm and self-governed. What now availed Jemima's reproaches, as she remembered the days when he had watched her with earnest, attentive eyes, as he now watched Ruth; and the times since, when, led astray by her morbid fancy, she had turned away from all his advances!

"It was only in March — last March, he called me 'dear Jemima.' Ah, don't I remember it well? The pretty nosegay of green-house flowers that he *gave me in exchange* for the wild daffodils — and how *he seemed to care* for the flowers I gave him — and

how he looked at me, and thanked me — that is all gone and over now."

Her sisters came in bright and glowing.

"Oh, Jemima, how nice and cool you are; sitting in this shady room!" (she had felt it even chilly.) "We have been such a long walk! We are so tired. It is so hot."

"Why did you go, then?" said she.

"Oh! we wanted to go. We would not have stayed at home on any account. It has been so pleasant," said Mary.

"We've been to Scaurside Wood, to gather wild-strawberries," said Elizabeth. "Such a quantity! We've left a whole basket-full in the dairy. Mr. Farquhar says he'll teach us how to dress them in the way he learnt in Germany, if we can get him some hock. Do you think papa will let us have some?"

"Was Mr. Farquhar with you?" asked Jemima, a dull light coming into her eyes.

"Yes, we told him this morning that mamma wanted us to take same old linen to the lame man at Scaurside Farm, and that we meant to coax Mrs. Denbigh to let us go into the wood and gather strawberries," said Elizabeth.

"I thought he would make some excuse and come," said the quick-witted Mary, as eager and thoughtless an observer of one love-affair as of another, and quite forgetting that, not many weeks ago, she had fancied an attachment between him and Jemima.

"Did you? I did not," replied Elizabeth. "At least I never thought about it. I was quite startled *when I* heard his horse's feet behind us on the road.

"*He* said he was going to the farm, and could not

our basket. Was not it kind of him?" Jemima did not answer, so Mary continued:

"You know it's a great pull up to the farm, and we were so hot already. The road was quite white and baked; it hurt my eyes terribly. I was so glad when Mrs. Denbigh said we might turn into the wood. The light was quite green there, the branches are so thick overhead."

"And there are whole beds of wild-strawberries," said Elizabeth, taking up the tale now Mary was out of breath. Mary fanned herself with her bonnet, while Elizabeth went on:

"You know where the grey rock crops out, don't you, Jemima? Well, there was a complete carpet of strawberry runners. So pretty! And we could hardly step without treading the little bright scarlet berries under foot."

"We did so wish for Leonard," put in Mary.

"Yes! but Mrs. Denbigh gathered a great many for him. And Mr. Farquhar gave her all his."

"I thought you said he had gone on to Dawson's farm," said Jemima.

"Oh, yes! he just went up there; and then he left his horse there, like a wise man, and came to us in the pretty, cool, green wood. Oh, Jemima, it was so pretty — little flecks of light coming down here and there through the leaves, and quivering on the ground. You must go with us to-morrow."

"Yes," said Mary, "we're going again to-morrow. We could not gather nearly all the strawberries."

"And Leonard is to go too, to-morrow."

"*Yes! we thought* of such a capital plan. That's *to say, Mr. Farquhar* thought of it — we wanted to

carry Leonard up the hill in a king's cushion, but Mrs. Denbigh would not hear of it."

"She said it would tire us so; and yet she wanted him to gather strawberries!"

"And so," interrupted Mary, for by this time the two girls were almost speaking together, "Mr. Farquhar is to bring him up before him on his horse."

"You 'll go with us, won't you, dear Jemima?" asked Elizabeth; "it will be at —"

"No! I can't go!" said Jemima, abruptly. "Don't ask me — I can't."

The little girls were hushed into silence by her manner; for whatever she might be to those above her in age and position, to those below her Jemima was almost invariably gentle. She felt that they were wondering at her.

"Go up-stairs and take off your things. You know papa does not like you to come into this room in the shoes in which you have been out."

She was glad to cut her sisters short in the details which they were so mercilessly inflicting — details which she must harden herself to, before she could hear them quietly and unmoved. She saw that she had lost her place as the first object in Mr. Farquhar's eyes — a position she had hardly cared for while she was secure in the enjoyment of it; but the charm of it now was redoubled, in her acute sense of how she had forfeited it by her own doing, and her own fault. For if he were the cold, calculating man her father had believed him to be, and had represented him as *being* to her, would he care for a portionless widow *in humble* circumstances like Mrs. Denbigh, no money, *no connexion*, encumbered with her boy? The very

action which proved Mr. Farquhar to be lost to Jemima, reinstated him on his throne in her fancy. And she must go on in hushed quietness, quivering with every fresh token of his preference for another! That other, too, one so infinitely more worthy of him than herself; so that she could not have even the poor comfort of thinking, that he had no discrimination, and was throwing himself away on a common or worthless person. Ruth was beautiful, gentle, good, and conscientious. The hot colour flushed up into Jemima's sallow face as she became aware that, even while she acknowledged these excellencies on Mrs. Denbigh's part, she hated her. The recollection of her marble face wearied her even to sickness; the tones of her low voice were irritating from their very softness. Her goodness, undoubted as it was, was more distasteful than many faults which had more savour of human struggle in them.

"What was this terrible demon in her heart?" asked Jemima's better angel. "Was she, indeed, given up to possession? Was not this the old stinging hatred which had prompted so many crimes? The hatred of all sweet virtues which might win the love denied to us? The old anger that wrought in the elder brother's heart, till it ended in the murder of the gentle Abel, while yet the world was young?"

"Oh, God! help me! I did not know I was so wicked," cried Jemima aloud in her agony. It had been a terrible glimpse into the dark lurid gulf — the capability for evil, in her heart. She wrestled with the demon, but he would not depart; it was to be a struggle whether or not she was to be given up to him, in this her time of sore temptation.

All the next day long, she sat and pictured the happy strawberry gathering going on, even then, in pleasant Scaurside Wood. Every touch of fancy which could heighten her idea of their enjoyment, and of Mr. Farquhar's attention to the blushing, conscious Ruth — every such touch which would add a pang to her self-reproach and keen jealousy, was added by her imagination. She got up and walked about, to try and stop her over-busy fancy by bodily exercise. But she had eaten little all day, and was weak and faint in the intense heat of the sunny garden. Even the long grass walk under the filbert hedge, was parched and dry in the glowing August sun. Yet her sisters found her there when they returned, walking quickly up and down, as if to warm herself on some winter's day. They were very weary; and not half so communicative as on the day before, now that Jemima was craving for every detail to add to her agony.

"Yes! Leonard came up before Mr. Farquhar. Oh! how hot it is, Jemima; do sit down, and I'll tell you about it, but I can't if you keep walking so!"

"I can't sit still to-day," said Jemima, springing up from the turf as soon as she had sat down. "Tell me! I can hear you while I walk about."

"Oh! but I can't shout; I can hardly speak I am so tired. Mr. Farquhar brought Leonard —"

"You 've told me that before," said Jemima, sharply.

"Well! I don't know what else to tell. Somebody had been since yesterday, and gathered nearly all the strawberries off the grey rock. Jemima! Jemima!" *said Elizabeth*, faintly, "I am so dizzy — I think I *am ill.*"

The next minute the tired girl lay swooning on the grass. It was an outlet for Jemima's fierce energy. With a strength she had never again, and never had known before, she lifted up her fainting sister, and bidding Mary run and clear the way, she carried her in through the open garden-door, up the wide old-fashioned stairs, and laid her on the bed in her own room, where the breeze from the window came softly and pleasantly through the green shade of the vine-leaves and jessamine.

"Give me the water. Run for mamma, Mary," said Jemima, as she saw that the fainting-fit did not yield to the usual remedy of a horizontal position, and the water sprinkling.

"Dear! dear Lizzie!" said Jemima, kissing the pale, unconscious face. "I think you loved me, darling."

The long walk on the hot day had been too much for the delicate Elizabeth, who was fast outgrowing her strength. It was many days before she regained any portion of her spirit and vigour. After that fainting-fit, she lay listless and weary, without appetite or interest, through the long sunny autumn weather, on the bed or on the couch in Jemima's room, whither she had been carried at first. It was a comfort to Mrs. Bradshaw to be able at once to discover what it was that had knocked up Elizabeth; she did not rest easily until she had settled upon a cause for every ailment or illness in the family. It was a stern consolation to Mr. Bradshaw, during his time of anxiety respecting his daughter, to be able to blame somebody. *He could not*, like his wife, have taken comfort *from an inanimate* fact; he wanted the satisfaction

of feeling that some one had been in fault, or else this never could have happened. Poor Ruth did not need his implied reproaches. When she saw her gentle Elizabeth lying feeble and languid, her heart blamed her for thoughtlessness, so severely as to make her take all Mr. Bradshaw's words and hints as too light censure for the careless way in which, to please her own child, she had allowed her two pupils to fatigue themselves with such long walks. She begged hard to take her share of nursing. Every spare moment she went to Mr. Bradshaw's, and asked, with earnest humility, to be allowed to pass them with Elizabeth and, as it was often a relief to have her assistance, Mrs. Bradshaw received these entreaties very kindly, and desired her to go up-stairs, where Elizabeth's pale countenance brightened when she saw her, but where Jemima sat in silent annoyance that her own room was now become open ground for one, whom her heart rose up against, to enter in and be welcomed. Whether it was that Ruth, who was not an inmate of the house, brought with her a fresher air, more change of thought to the invalid, I do not know, but Elizabeth always gave her a peculiarly tender greeting; and if she had sunk down into languid fatigue, in spite of all Jemima's endeavours to interest her, she roused up into animation when Ruth came in with a flower, a book, or a brown and ruddy pear, sending out the warm fragrance it retained from the sunny garden-wall at Chapel-house.

The jealous dislike which Jemima was allowing to grow up in her heart against Ruth was, as she *thought*, never shown in word or deed. She was cold *in manner*, because she could not be hypocritical; but

her words were polite and kind in purport; and she took pains to make her actions the same as formerly. But rule and line may measure out the figure of a man; it is the soul that gives it life; and there was no soul, no inner meaning, breathing out in Jemima's actions. Ruth felt the change acutely. She suffered from it some time before she ventured to ask what had occasioned it. But, one day, she took Miss Bradshaw by surprise, when they were alone together for a few minutes, by asking her if she had vexed her in any way, she was so changed? It is sad when friendship has cooled so far as to render such a question necessary. Jemima went rather paler than usual, and then made answer:

"Changed! How do you mean? How am I changed? What do I say or do different from what I used to do?"

But the tone was so constrained and cold, that Ruth's heart sank within her. She knew now, as well as words could have told her, that not only had the old feeling of love passed away from Jemima, but that it had gone unregretted, and no attempt had been made to recal it. Love was very precious to Ruth now, as of old time. It was one of the faults of her nature to be ready to make any sacrifices for those who loved her, and to value affection almost above its price. She had yet to learn the lesson, that it is more blessed to love than to be beloved; and lonely as the impressible years of her youth had been — without parents, without brother or sister — it was, perhaps, no wonder that she clung tenaciously to every symptom of regard, and could not relinquish the love *of any one without* a pang.

The doctor who was called in to Elizabeth scribed sea-air as the best means of recruiting strength. Mr. Bradshaw, who liked to spend m ostentatiously, went down straight to Abermouth. engaged a house for the remainder of the autumn; as he told the medical man, money was no obje him in comparison with his children's health; an doctor cared too little about the mode in whicl remedy was administered, to tell Mr. Bradshaw lodgings would have done as well, or better, tha complete house he had seen fit to take. For it now necessary to engage servants, and take trouble, which might have been obviated, and E beth's removal effected more quietly and speedil she had gone into lodgings. As it was, she weary of hearing all the planning and talking, deciding and undeciding, and re-deciding, befo was possible for her to go. Her only comfort in the thought, that dear Mrs. Denbigh was t with her.

It had not been entirely by way of pomp spending his money that Mr. Bradshaw had eng this sea-side house. He was glad to get his girls and their governess out of the way; for a time was impending, when he should want his clear for electioneering purposes, and his house for electioneering hospitality. He was the mover project for bringing forward a man, on the Li and Dissenting interest, to contest the election the old Tory member, who had on several succe occasions walked over the course, as he and his f owned half the town, and votes and rent were *alike to the* landlord.

Kings of Eccleston had Mr. Cranworth and his
cestors been this many a long year; their right was
little disputed that they never thought of acknow-
lging the allegiance so readily paid to them. The
l feudal feeling between landowner and tenant did
t quake prophetically at the introduction of manu-
ctures; the Cranworth family ignored the growing
wer of the manufacturers, more especially as the
incipal person engaged in the trade was a Dissenter.
it notwithstanding this lack of patronage from the
e great family in the neighbourhood, the business
urished, increased, and spread wide; and the Dis-
nting head thereof looked around, about the time of
ich I speak, and felt himself powerful enough to
fy the great Cranworth interest even in their here-
tary stronghold, and, by so doing, avenge the slights
many years — slights which rankled in Mr. Brad-
aw's mind as much as if he did not go to chapel
ice every Sunday, and pay the largest pew-rent of
y member of Mr. Benson's congregation.

Accordingly, Mr. Bradshaw had applied to one of
e Liberal parliamentary agents in London — a man
iose only principle was to do wrong on the Liberal
le; he would not act, right or wrong, for a Tory,
t for a Whig the latitude of his conscience had
ver yet been discovered. It was possible Mr. Brad-
aw was not aware of the character of this agent; at
y rate, he knew he was the man for his purpose,
ich was to hear of some one who would come for-
ard as a candidate for the representation of Eccleston
. the Dissenting interest.

"There are in round numbers about six hundred
ters," said he; "two hundred are decidedly in the

Cranworth interest — dare not offend Mr. Cranworth, poor souls! Two hundred more we may calculate upon as pretty certain — factory hands, or people connected with our trade in some way or another — who are indignant at the stubborn way in which Cranworth has contested the right of water; two hundred are doubtful."

"Don't much care either way," said the parliamentary agent. "Of course, we must make them care."

Mr. Bradshaw rather shrunk from the knowing look with which this was said. He hoped that Mr. Pilson did not mean to allude to bribery; but he did not express this hope, because he thought it would deter the agent from using this means, and it was possible it might prove to be the only way. And if he (Mr. Bradshaw) once embarked on such an enterprise, there must be no failure. By some expedient or another, success must be certain, or he could have nothing to do with it.

The parliamentary agent was well accustomed to deal with all kinds and shades of scruples. He was most at home with men who had none; but still he could allow for human weakness; and he perfectly understood Mr. Bradshaw.

"I have a notion I know of a man who will just suit your purpose. Plenty of money — does not know what to do with it, in fact — tired of yachting, travelling, wants something new. I heard, through some of the means of intelligence I employ, that not very long ago he was wishing for a seat in Parliament."

"*A Liberal?*" said Mr. Bradshaw.

"Decidedly. Belongs to a family who were in the Long Parliament in their day."

Mr. Bradshaw rubbed his hands.

"Dissenter?" asked he.

"No, no! Not so far as that. But very lax Church."

"What is his name?" asked Mr. Bradshaw, eagerly.

"Excuse me. Until I am certain that he would like to come forward for Eccleston, I think I had better not mention his name."

The anonymous gentleman did like to come forward, and his name proved to be Donne He and Mr. Bradshaw had been in correspondence during all the time of Mr. Ralph Cranworth's illness, and when he died, everything was arranged ready for a start, even before the Cranworths had determined who should keep the seat warm till the eldest son came of age, for the father was already member for the county. Mr. Donne was to come down to canvass in person, and was to take up his abode at Mr. Bradshaw's; and therefore it was that the sea-side house, within twenty miles' distance of Eccleston, was found to be so convenient as an infirmary and nursery for those members of his family who were likely to be useless, if not positive encumbrances, during the forthcoming election.

CHAPTER XXII.

JEMIMA did not know whether she wished to go to Abermouth or not. She longed for change. She wearied of the sights and sounds of home. But yet she could not bear to leave the neighbourhood of Mr. Farquhar; especially as, if she went to Abermouth, Ruth would in all probability be left to take her holiday at home.

When Mr. Bradshaw decided that she was to go, Ruth tried to feel glad that he gave her the means of repairing her fault towards Elizabeth; and she resolved to watch over the two girls most faithfully and carefully, and to do all in her power to restore the invalid to health. But a tremor came over her whenever she thought of leaving Leonard; she had never quitted him for a day, and it seemed to her as if her brooding, constant care, was his natural and necessary shelter from all evils — from very death itself. She would not go to sleep at nights, in order to enjoy the blessed consciousness of having him near her; when she was away from him teaching her pupils, she kept trying to remember his face, and print it deep on her heart, against the time when days and days would elapse without her seeing that little darling countenance. Miss Benson would wonder to her brother that Mr. Bradshaw did not propose that Leonard should accompany his mother; he only begged her not to put such an idea into Ruth's head, as he was sure Mr. Bradshaw had

no thoughts of doing any such thing, yet to Ruth it might be a hope, and then a disappointment. His sister scolded him for being so cold-hearted; but he was full of sympathy, although he did not express it, and made some quiet little sacrifices in order to set himself at liberty to take Leonard a long walking expedition on the day when his mother left Eccleston.

Ruth cried until she could cry no longer, and felt very much ashamed of herself as she saw the grave and wondering looks of her pupils, whose only feeling on leaving home was delight at the idea of Abermouth, and into whose minds the possibility of death to any of their beloved ones never entered. Ruth dried her eyes, and spoke cheerfully as soon as she caught the perplexed expression of their faces; and by the time they arrived at Abermouth, she was as much delighted with all the new scenery as they were, and found it hard work to resist their entreaties to go rambling out on the sea-shore at once; but Elizabeth had undergone more fatigue that day, than she had had before for many weeks, and Ruth was determined to be prudent.

Meanwhile, the Bradshaws' house at Eccleston was being rapidly adapted for electioneering hospitality. The partition-wall between the un-used drawing-room and the school-room was broken down, in order to admit of folding-doors; the "ingenious" upholsterer of the town (and what town does not boast of the upholsterer full of contrivances and resources, in opposition to the upholsterer of steady capital and no imagination, who looks down with uneasy contempt on ingenuity?) had come in to give his opinion, that "nothing could be easier than to convert a bath-room into a bedroom, by the assistance of a little drapery to

conceal the shower-bath," the string of which was to be carefully concealed, for fear that the unconscious occupier of the bath-bed might innocently take it for a bell-rope. The professional cook of the town had been already engaged to take up her abode for a month at Mr. Bradshaw's, much to the indignation of Betsy, who became a vehement partisan of Mr. Cranworth, as soon as ever she heard of the plan of her deposition from sovereign authority in the kitchen, in which she had reigned supreme for fourteen years. Mrs. Bradshaw sighed and bemoaned herself in all her leisure moments, which were not many, and wondered why their house was to be turned into an inn for this Mr. Donne, when everybody knew that the George was good enough for the Cranworths, who never thought of asking the electors to the Hall; — and they had lived at Cranworth ever since Julius Cæsar's time, and if that was not being an old family, she did not know what was. The excitement soothed Jemima. There was something to do. It was she who planned with the upholsterer; it was she who soothed Betsy into angry silence; it was she who persuaded her mother to lie down and rest, while she herself went out to buy the heterogeneous things required to make the family and house presentable to Mr. Donne, and his precursor — the friend of the parliamentary agent. This latter gentleman never appeared himself on the scene of action, but pulled all the strings notwithstanding. The friend was a Mr. Hickson, a lawyer — a briefless barrister, some people called him; but he himself professed a *great* disgust to the law, as a "great sham," which *involved an* immensity of underhand action, and truck*ling and* time-serving, and was perfectly encumbered

by useless forms and ceremonies, and dead obsolete words. So, instead of putting his shoulder to the wheel to reform the law, he talked eloquently against it, in such a high-priest style, that it was occasionally a matter of surprise how he could ever have made a friend of the parliamentary agent before mentioned. But, as Mr. Hickson himself said, it was the very corruptness of the law which he was fighting against, in doing all he could to effect the return of certain members to Parliament; these certain members being pledged to effect a reform in the law, according to Mr. Hickson. And, as he once observed confidentially, "If you had to destroy a hydra-headed monster, would you measure swords with the demon as if he were a gentleman? Would you not rather seize the first weapon that came to hand? And so do I. My great object in life, Sir, is to reform the law of England, Sir. Once get a majority of Liberal members into the House, and the thing is done. And I consider myself justified, for so high — for, I may say, so holy — an end, in using men's weaknesses to work out my purpose. Of course, if men were angels, or even immaculate — men invulnerable to bribes, we would not bribe."

"Could you?" asked Jemima, for the conversation took place at Mr. Bradshaw's dinner-table, where a few friends were gathered together to meet Mr. Hickson; and among them was Mr. Benson.

"We neither would nor could," said the ardent barrister, disregarding in his vehemence the point of the question, and floating on over the bar of argument into the wide ocean of his own eloquence: "As it is — *as the world stands*, they who would succeed even *in good deeds*, must come down to the level of expe-

diency; and therefore, I say once more, if Mr. Donne is the man for your purpose, and your purpose is a good one, a lofty one, a holy one" (for Mr. Hickson remembered the Dissenting character of his little audience, and privately considered the introduction of the word 'holy' a most happy hit), "then, I say, we must put all the squeamish scruples which might befit Utopia, or some such place, on one side, and treat men as they are. If they are avaricious, it is not we who have made them so; but as we have to do with them, we must consider their failings in dealing with them; if they have been careless or extravagant, or have had their little peccadillos, we must administer the screw. The glorious reform of the law will justify, in my idea, all means to obtain the end — that law, from the profession of which I have withdrawn myself from perhaps a too scrupulous conscience!" He concluded softly to himself.

"We are not to do evil that good may come," said Mr. Benson. He was startled at the deep sound of his own voice as he uttered these words; but he had not been speaking for some time, and his voice came forth strong and unmodulated.

"True, Sir; most true," said Mr. Hickson, bowing. "I honour you for the observation." And he profited by it, insomuch that he confined his further remarks on elections to the end of the table, where he sat near Mr. Bradshaw, and one or two equally eager, though not equally influential partisans of Mr. Donne's. Meanwhile, Mr. Farquhar took up Mr. Benson's quotation, at the end where he and Jemima sat near to *Mrs. Bradshaw* and him.

"*But in* the present state of the world, as Mr.

Hickson says, it is rather difficult to act upon that precept."

"Oh, Mr. Farquhar!" said Jemima, indignantly, the tears springing to her eyes with a feeling of disappointment. For she had been chafing under all that Mr. Hickson had been saying, perhaps the more for one or two attempts on his part at a flirtation with the daughter of his wealthy host, which she resented with all the loathing of a pre-occupied heart; and she had longed to be a man, to speak out her wrath at this paltering with right and wrong. She had felt grateful to Mr. Benson for his one, clear, short precept, coming down with a divine force against which there was no appeal; and now to have Mr. Farquhar taking the side of expediency! It was too bad.

"Nay, Jemima!" said Mr. Farquhar, touched, and secretly flattered by the visible pain his speech had given. "Don't be indignant with me till I have explained myself a little more. I don't understand myself yet; and it is a very intricate question, or so it appears to me, which I was going to put, really, earnestly, and humbly, for Mr. Benson's opinion. Now, Mr. Benson, may I ask, if you always find it practicable to act strictly in accordance with that principle? For if you do not, I am sure no man living can! Are there not occasions when it is absolutely necessary to wade through evil to good? I am not speaking in the careless, presumptuous way of that man yonder," said he, lowering his voice, and addressing himself to Jemima more exclusively, "I am really anxious to hear what Mr. Benson will say on the subject, for I *know no* one to whose candid opinion I *should attach more* weight."

But Mr. Benson was silent. He did not see Mrs. Bradshaw and Jemima leave the room. He was really, as Mr. Farquhar supposed him, completely absent, questioning himself as to how far his practice tallied with his principle. By degrees he came to himself; he found the conversation still turned on the election; and Mr. Hickson, who felt that he had jarred against the little minister's principles, and yet knew, from the *carte du pays* which the scouts of the parliamentary agent had given him, that Mr. Benson was a person to be conciliated, on account of his influence over many of the working people, began to ask him questions with an air of deferring to superior knowledge, that almost surprised Mr. Bradshaw, who had been accustomed to treat "Benson" in a very different fashion, of civil condescending indulgence, just as one listens to a child who can have had no opportunities of knowing better.

At the end of a conversation that Mr. Hickson held with Mr. Benson, on a subject in which the latter was really interested, and on which he had expressed himself at some length, the young barrister turned to Mr. Bradshaw, and said very audibly,

"I wish Donne had been here. This conversation during the last half hour would have interested him almost as much as it has done me."

Mr. Bradshaw little guessed the truth, that Mr. Donne was, at that very moment, coaching up the various subjects of public interest in Eccleston, and privately cursing the particular subject on which Mr. Benson had been holding forth, as being an unintelligible piece of Quixotism; or the leading Dissenter of the town need not have experienced a pang of jealousy, at the possible future admiration his minister

might excite in the possible future member for Eccleston. And if Mr. Benson had been clairvoyant, he need not have made an especial subject of gratitude out of the likelihood that he might have an opportunity of so far interesting Mr. Donne in the condition of the people of Eccleston as to induce him to set his face against any attempts at bribery.

Mr. Benson thought of this, half the night through; and ended by determining to write a sermon on the Christian view of political duties, which might be good for all, both electors and member, to hear on the eve of an election. For Mr. Donne was expected at Mr. Bradshaw's before the next Sunday; and, of course, as Mr. and Miss Benson had settled it, he would appear at the chapel with them on that day. But the stinging conscience refused to be quieted. No present plan of usefulness allayed the aching remembrance of the evil he had done that good might come. Not even the look of Leonard, as the early dawn fell on him, and Mr. Benson's sleepless eyes saw the rosy glow on his firm round cheeks; his open mouth, through which the soft, long-drawn breath came gently quivering; and his eyes not fully shut, but closed to outward sight — not even the aspect of the quiet innocent child could soothe the troubled spirit.

Leonard and his mother dreamt of each other that night. Her dream of him was one of undefined terror — terror so great that it wakened her up, and she strove not to sleep again, for fear that ominous ghastly dream should return. He, on the contrary, dreamt of her sitting watching and smiling by his bedside, as her *gentle self had* been many a morning; and when *she saw him awake* (so it fell out in the dream), she *miled still more* sweetly, and bending down she

kissed him, and then spread out large, soft, white-feathered wings (which in no way surprised her child — he seemed to have known they were there all along), and sailed away through the open window far into the blue sky of a summer's day. Leonard wakened up then, and remembered how far away she really was — far more distant and inaccessible than the beautiful blue sky to which she had betaken herself in his dream — and cried himself to sleep again.

In spite of her absence from her child, which made one great and abiding sorrow, Ruth enjoyed her seaside visit exceedingly. In the first place, there was the delight of seeing Elizabeth's daily and almost hourly improvement. Then, at the doctor's express orders, there were so few lessons to be done, that there was time for the long-exploring rambles, which all three delighted in. And when the rain came on and the storms blew, the house with its wild sea views was equally delightful.

It was a large house, built on the summit of a rock, which nearly overhung the shore below; there were, to be sure, a series of zig-zag tacking paths down the face of this rock, but from the house they could not be seen. Old or delicate people would have considered the situation bleak and exposed; indeed, the present proprietor wanted to dispose of it on this very account; but by its present inhabitants, this exposure and bleakness were called by other names, and considered as charms. From every part of the rooms, they saw the grey storms gather on the sea horizon, and put themselves in marching array; and soon the *march* became a sweep, and the great dome of the *heavens was* covered with the lurid clouds, between *which* and the vivid green earth below there seemed

to come a purple atmosphere, making the very threatening beautiful; and by-and-by the house was wrapped in sheets of rain, shutting out sky and sea, and inland view; till, of a sudden, the storm was gone by, and the heavy rain-drops glistened in the sun as they hung on leaf and grass, and the "little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west," and there was a pleasant sound of running waters all abroad.

"Oh! if papa would but buy this house!" exclaimed Elizabeth, after one such storm, which she had watched silently from the very beginning of the "little cloud no bigger than a man's hand."

"Mamma would never like it, I am afraid," said Mary. "She would call our delicious gushes of air, draughts, and think we should catch cold."

"Jemima would be on our side. But how long Mrs. Denbigh is! I hope she was near enough to the post-office when the rain came on!"

Ruth had gone to "the shop" in the little village, about half a mile distant, where all letters were left till fetched. She only expected one, but that one was to tell her of Leonard. She, however, received two; the unexpected one was from Mr. Bradshaw, and the news it contained was, if possible, a greater surprise than the letter itself. Mr. Bradshaw informed her, that he planned arriving by dinner-time the following Saturday, at Eagle's Crag; and more, that he intended bringing Mr. Donne and one or two other gentlemen with him, to spend the Sunday there! The letter went on to give every possible direction regarding the household preparations. The dinner-hour was fixed to be at six; but, *of course*, Ruth and the girls would have dined *ong before. The* (professional) cook would arrive the *y before, laden* with all the provisions that could

not be obtained on the spot. Ruth was to engage a waiter from the inn, and this it was that detained her so long. While she sat in the little parlour, awaiting the coming of the landlady, she could not help wondering why Mr. Bradshaw was bringing this strange gentleman to spend two days at Abermouth, and thus giving himself so much trouble and fuss of preparation.

There were so many small reasons that went to make up the large one which had convinced Mr. Bradshaw of the desirableness of this step, that it was not likely that Ruth should guess at one half of them. In the first place, Miss Benson, in the pride and fulness of her heart, had told Mrs. Bradshaw what her brother had told her; how he meant to preach upon the Christian view of the duties involved in political rights; and as, of course, Mrs. Bradshaw had told Mr. Bradshaw, he began to dislike the idea of attending chapel on that Sunday at all; for he had an uncomfortable idea that by the Christian standard — that divine test of the true and pure — bribery would not be altogether approved of; and yet he was tacitly coming round to the understanding that "packets" would be required, for what purpose both he and Mr. Donne were to be supposed to remain ignorant. But it would be very awkward, so near to the time, if he were to be clearly convinced that bribery, however disguised by names and words, was in plain terms a sin. And yet he knew Mr. Benson had once or twice convinced him against his will of certain things, which he had thenceforward found it impossible to do, without such great uneasiness of mind, that he had left off doing them, *which was* sadly against his interest. And if Mr. Donne (*whom he had* intended to take with him to chapel, as *fair Dissenting* prey) should also become convinced

why the Cranworths would win the day, and he should be the laughing-stock of Eccleston. No! in this one case bribery must be allowed — was allowable; but it was a great pity human nature was so corrupt, and if his member succeeded, he would double his subscription to the schools, in order that the next generation might be taught better. There were various other reasons, which strengthened Mr. Bradshaw in the bright idea of going down to Abermouth for the Sunday; some connected with the out-of-door politics, and some with the domestic. For instance, it had been the plan of the house to have a cold dinner on the Sundays — Mr. Bradshaw had piqued himself on this strictness — and yet he had an instinctive feeling that Mr. Donne was not quite the man to partake of cold meat for conscience' sake with cheerful indifference to his fare.

Mr. Donne had, in fact, taken the Bradshaw household a little by surprise. Before he came, Mr. Bradshaw had pleased himself with thinking, that more unlikely things had happened than the espousal of his daughter with the member of a small borough. But this pretty airy bubble burst as soon as he saw Mr. Donne; and its very existence was forgotten in less than half an hour, when he felt the quiet, but incontestible difference of rank and standard that there was, in every respect, between his guest and his own family. It was not through any circumstance so palpable, and possibly accidental, as the bringing down a servant, whom Mr. Donne seemed to consider as much a matter of course as a carpet-bag (though the smart gentleman's arrival "fluttered the Volscians in Corioli" considerably *more than his* gentle-spoken master's). It was *nothing like this; it* was something indescribable — a *quiet being at ease*, and expecting every one else to

be so — an attention to women, which was so habitual as to be unconsciously exercised to those subordinate persons in Mr. Bradshaw's family — a happy choice of simple and expressive words, some of which it must be confessed were slang, but fashionable slang, and that makes all the difference — a measured, graceful way of utterance, with a style of pronunciation quite different to that of Eccleston. All these put together make but a part of the indescribable whole which unconsciously affected Mr. Bradshaw, and established Mr. Donne in his estimation as a creature quite different to any he had seen before, and as most unfit to mate with Jemima. Mr. Hickson, who had appeared as a model of gentlemanly ease before Mr. Donne's arrival, now became vulgar and coarse in Mr. Bradshaw's eyes. And yet, such was the charm of that languid, high-bred manner, that Mr. Bradshaw "cottoned" (as he expressed it to Mr. Farquhar) to his new candidate at once. He was only afraid lest Mr. Donne was too indifferent to all things under the sun, to care whether he gained or lost the election; but he was reassured, after the first conversation they had together on the subject. Mr. Donne's eye lightened with an eagerness that was almost fierce, though his tones were as musical, and nearly as slow as ever; and when Mr. Bradshaw alluded distantly to "probable expenses" and "packets," Mr. Donne replied.

"Oh, of course! disagreeable necessity! Better speak as little about such things as possible; other people can be found to arrange all the dirty work. Neither you nor I would like to soil our fingers by it, I am *sure. Four* thousand pounds are in Mr. Pilson's hands, *and I shall* never inquire what becomes of them; they *may, very* probably, be absorbed in the law expenses

you know. I shall let it be clearly understood from the hustings, that I most decidedly disapprove of bribery, and leave the rest to Hickson's management. He is accustomed to these sort of things. I am not."

Mr. Bradshaw was rather perplexed by this want of bustling energy on the part of the new candidate; and if it had not been for the four thousand pounds aforesaid, would have doubted whether Mr. Donne cared sufficiently for the result of the election. Jemima thought differently. She watched her father's visitor attentively, with something like the curious observation which a naturalist bestows on a new species of animal.

"Do you know what Mr. Donne reminds me of, Mamma?" said she, one day, as the two sat at work, while the gentlemen were absent canvassing.

"No! he is not like anybody I ever saw. He quite frightens me, by being so ready to open the door for me if I am going out of the room, and by giving me a chair when I come in. I never saw any one like him. Who is it, Jemima?"

"Not any person — not any human being, Mamma," said Jemima, half smiling. "Do you remember our stopping at Wakefield once, on our way to Scarborough, and there were horse-races going on somewhere, and some of the racers were in the stables at the inn where we dined?"

"Yes! I remember it; but what about that?"

"Why Richard, somehow, knew one of the jockeys, and, as we were coming in from our ramble through the town, this man, or boy, asked us to look at one of the racers he had the charge of."

"*Well, my dear!*"

"*Well, Mamma!* Mr. Donne is like that horse!"

"*Nonsense, Jemima*; you must not say so. I don't

know what your father would say, if he heard you likening Mr. Donne to a brute."

"Brutes are sometimes very beautiful, Mamma. I am sure I should think it a compliment to be likened to a race-horse, such as the one we saw. But the thing in which they are alike, is the sort of repressed eagerness in both."

"Eager! Why, I should say there never was any one cooler than Mr. Donne. Think of the trouble your papa has had this month past, and then remember the slow way in which Mr. Donne moves when he is going out to canvass, and the low drawling voice in which he questions the people who bring him intelligence. I can see your papa standing by, ready to shake them to get out their news."

"But Mr. Donne's questions are always to the point, and force out the grain without the chaff. And look at him, if any one tells him ill news about the election! Have you never seen a dull red light come into his eyes? That is like my race-horse. Her flesh quivered all over, at certain sounds and noises which had some meaning to her; but she stood quite still, pretty creature! Now, Mr. Donne is just as eager as she was, though he may be too proud to show it. Though he seems so gentle, I almost think he is very headstrong in following out his own will."

"Well! don't call him like a horse again, for I am sure papa would not like it. Do you know, I thought you were going to say he was like little Leonard, when you asked me who he was like."

"Leonard! Oh, Mamma, he is not in the least like Leonard. He is twenty times more like my race-horse."

"*Now*, my dear Jemima, do be quiet. Your *father thinks* racing so wrong, that I am sure he *would be* very seriously displeased if he were to hear you."

To return to Mr. Bradshaw, and to give one more of his various reasons for wishing to take Mr. Donne to Abermouth. The wealthy Eccleston manufacturer was uncomfortably impressed with an indefinable sense of inferiority to his visitor. It was not in education, for Mr. Bradshaw was a well-educated man; it was not in power, for, if he chose, the present object of Mr. Donne's life might be utterly defeated; it did not arise from anything overbearing in manner, for Mr. Donne was habitually polite and courteous, and was just now anxious to propitiate his host, whom he looked upon as a very useful man. Whatever this sense of inferiority arose from, Mr. Bradshaw was anxious to relieve himself of it, and imagined that if he could make more display of his wealth his object would be obtained. Now his house in Eccleston was old-fashioned, and ill-calculated to exhibit money's worth. His mode of living, though strained to a high pitch just at this time, he became aware was no more than Mr. Donne was accustomed to every day of his life. The first day at dessert, some remark (some opportune remark, as Mr. Bradshaw in his innocence had thought) was made regarding the price of pine-apples, which was rather exorbitant that year, and Mr. Donne asked Mrs. Bradshaw, with quiet surprise, if they had no pinery, as if to be without a pinery were indeed a depth of pitiable destitution. In fact, Mr. Donne had been born and cradled in all that wealth could purchase, and so had his ancestors before him for so many generations, that refinement and luxury seemed the natural condition of man, and they that dwelt without were in the position of monsters. The absence was noticed; but not the presence.

Now Mr. Bradshaw knew that the house and

grounds of Eagle's Crag were exorbitantly dear, and yet he really thought of purchasing them. And as one means of exhibiting his wealth, and so raising himself up to the level of Mr. Donne, he thought that if he could take the latter down to Abermouth, and show him the place for which, "because his little girls had taken a fancy to it," he was willing to give the fancy-price of fourteen thousand pounds, he should at last make those half-shut dreamy eyes open wide, and their owner confess that, in wealth at least, the Eccleston manufacturer stood on a par with him.

All these mingled motives caused the determination which made Ruth sit in the little inn-parlour at Abermouth during the wild storm's passage.

She wondered if she had fulfilled all Mr. Bradshaw's directions. She looked at the letter. Yes! everything was done. And now home with her news, through the wet lane, where the little pools by the roadside reflected the deep blue sky and the round white clouds with even deeper blue and clearer white; and the rain-drops hung so thick on the trees, that even a little bird's flight was enough to shake them down in a bright shower as of rain. When she told the news, Mary exclaimed,

"Oh, how charming! Then we shall see this new member after all!" while Elizabeth added,

"Yes! I shall like to do that. But where must we be? Papa will want the dining-room and this room, and where must we sit?"

"Oh!" said Ruth, "in the dressing-room next to my room. All that your papa wants always, is that *you are quiet* and out of the way."

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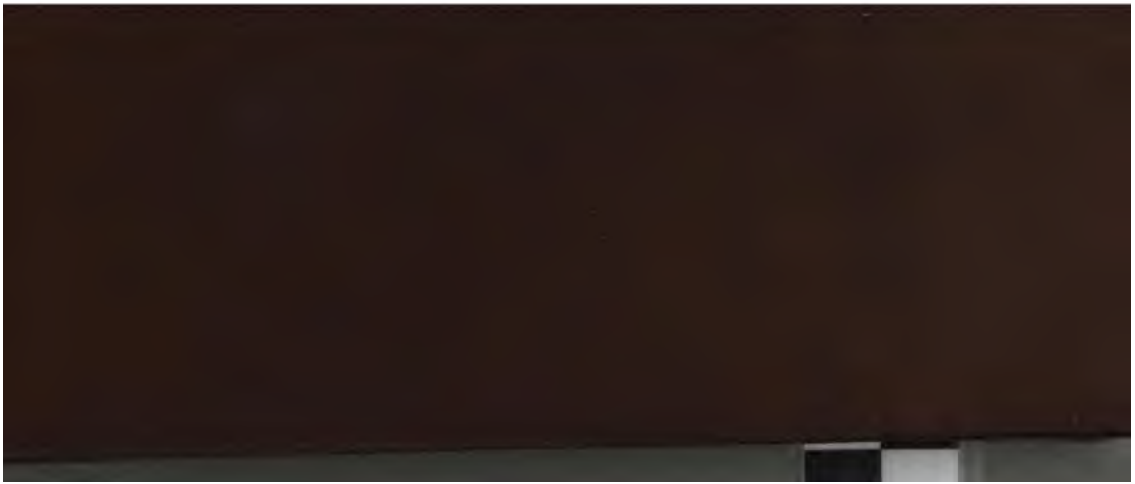
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